

1-1-2011

# The Forced Expulsion of Ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia after World War II: Memory, Identity, and History

Erin Wilson

Connecticut College, [erin.wilson@conncoll.edu](mailto:erin.wilson@conncoll.edu)

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**The Forced Expulsion of Ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia after World War II:  
Memory, Identity, and History**

An Honors Thesis  
Presented by  
**Erin Wilson**

To  
The Department of History  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
Honors in the Major Field

Connecticut College  
New London, Connecticut  
April 25, 2011

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## Acknowledgments

The writing of this thesis would not have been possible without the support and inspiration of many individuals and organizations who I would like to take this opportunity to thank.

I would first like to thank my advisor, Professor Marc Forster, for being the best thesis advisor I could have asked for. His guidance and assistance in writing this thesis was invaluable, and I could not have done this without him. Working with Professor Forster has been a privilege and I cannot express strongly enough how much I have appreciated his patience with me, enthusiasm for this project, and superhuman ability to read, critique, and return anything I sent him within forty-eight hours.

I would also like to thank my readers, Professors Fred Paxton and Kerstin Mueller, who helped me make this thesis as strong and as thorough as it could be. Professors David Patton and Tristan Borer were extremely helpful when I was starting this project and I really appreciate the time and information they so generously gave me. I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Lisa Wilson for inspiring me to major in History and encouraging me to complete this thesis.

I must thank the ConnSSHARP committee and Dean Theresa Ammirati, for the opportunity I was given in the summer of 2010 to do research in Germany and on campus with their generous grant. I would also like to thank the extremely knowledgeable staff at the Haus des Deutschen Ostens in Munich and the incredible reference librarians at Shain Library for assisting me so much while I was working in their libraries and archives.

A special thank you goes out to Dr. Habil. Tamás Magyarics for inspiring this thesis through a class I took while I was studying abroad. I first learned about the postwar

expulsions in his class, and I am certain that this thesis would never have come to be without his influence during my semester in the IES Vienna program.

Finally, to my loving family and friends, who have endured countless conversations about Czechoslovakia and forced migration over the past year, thank you for encouraging me and supporting me through this process. To Mom, Dad, Meghan, Brendan, John, Julie, all my fellow thesis writers in the History department, and everyone else who put up with me and convinced me not to give up, even when I was stressed out and melting down, I owe you one.

## Chronology

*1526-1918:* The Habsburg Empire rules the territory of the Kingdom of Bohemia.

*1618-1648:* Thirty Years' War

*1620:* Battle of White Mountain

*1848:* A Czech uprising against the absolute rule of the Habsburg Empire fails.

*1914-1918:* World War I

*1918-1938:* The First Czechoslovak Republic replaces the Habsburg Empire as the governing body of the territory.

*1938:* The Munich Pact cedes the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany with the agreement of British and French leaders. The Second Czechoslovak Republic is formed.

*1939:* The “rump” of the Second Czechoslovak Republic is invaded and occupied by Nazi forces, and its name is changed to the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia until the end of World War II.

*1939-1945:* World War II

*May 1, 1945:* Uprisings against the Nazis begin across Czechoslovakia, marking the end of the Nazi occupation and the beginning of Czech actions against the German population of the country, including violence and imprisonment.

*May-August 1945:* The “wild transfers” of nearly 800,000 Germans take place, keeping them in squalid internment and concentration camps before forcing them across the borders of Germany, Austria, and Poland.

*July 17 – August 2, 1945:* A conference of American, British, and Soviet leaders accepts the Potsdam Agreement, which had specific stipulations for the “organized transfer” of German refugees from Czechoslovakia.

*January – October 1946:* More than two million Germans are expelled from Czechoslovakia into the Soviet and American zones of Germany during the “organized transfers.”

*February 1948:* A Communist coup overthrows the Third Republic of Czechoslovakia.

## Introduction

This study began as an examination of the expulsion of the ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia in the immediate aftermath of World War II. There were two main periods of expulsion, with the “wild transfers” taking place in 1945, followed by the “organized transfers” in 1946. The first period is primarily remembered for the chaotic violence that accompanied the expulsion, while the second was known for its international acceptance and more structured procedures. Both periods present fascinating stories, the details of which could fill a book. A simple analysis of the events of those two periods, though, would not be enough to get at the core of the hostility that erupted in Czechoslovakia after World War II. In order to do that, it is essential to look at both the history of Czech-German relations over the long term and the experience of the expellees themselves during the process of expulsion. By exploring the historical background and the personal memories of the people most affected by the population transfers, this study will explore the impact of collective memory and its influence on national identity. The use of firsthand accounts from expellees also lends itself to an examination of the role of subjectivity in history, which is so often seen as an “objective” enterprise.

This approach elevates this study beyond a mere examination of the events that took place in postwar Czechoslovakia. Examining individual accounts of the expulsions provides an opportunity to observe the way collective memory is formed within a group. The memories of individual Sudeten Germans from 1945 and 1946 have been collected in the postwar years to create the group narrative of the expulsions, while Czech memories of the same period of time present a conflicting story. The interaction of individual memories with the collective memory of both the group to which an individual

belongs and groups with differing collective memories is key to understanding the importance of the expulsions in Central European history since the end of the war. Conflicting and shifting collective memories still govern the relationship between Czechs and Sudeten Germans to the present day, and the development of those memories are one of the primary concerns of this study.

Furthermore, analyzing the collective memories of both the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans helps the reader understand the national and ethnic identities of both groups. Collective memory plays a huge role in uniting the members of a given group and defines their relationship to the world around them. The collective memories of persecution and victimhood on both sides of the expulsions have defined the identities of Czechs and Sudeten Germans for more than sixty years. Acceptance of the collective narrative of the expulsions has been crucial to the development of a unified identity, both for those who were expelled and for those who did the expelling. Both Czechs and Germans often interpret the history that preceded the expulsions in a way that informs the identity of these groups, projecting twentieth-century tensions backward onto previous eras. The long history of Czech-German coexistence certainly informed the events of the expulsions, but the tendency to assume longstanding tensions in light of the extreme actions taken in 1945 and 1946 is misleading. This projection of twentieth-century hostilities onto earlier times serves the purpose of creating a singular history for a given group, but it masks the complicated reality of life in the Czech lands prior to World War II. This study is concerned with the ways in which the long history and more recent memory of both the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans influenced their identities, and both



pieces are equally important to understanding the postwar expulsions and the group unity that has been largely maintained since the expulsions.

Finally, recognizing the influence of both memory and identity on history is essential to understanding the expulsions. Both the collective memory and ethnic identity of the Sudeten Germans and Czechs have shaped the accepted histories of the events of 1945 and 1946. Examining history in light of the emotional and individualized memories of specific members of an ethnic group can show historians how the history of a major event can be extremely subjective and how the accepted “big picture” of history is often more complicated than initially thought. This study is particularly focused on the influence of individual memories and identities on the history of events like the population transfers, as well as the ways in which those inherently personal attitudes influence the recording and teaching of history itself. That interaction is central to this study and is crucial to understanding why the expulsions are so significant, because it is a case study in the process of the creation of history, and helps explain the tension between Czechs and Sudeten Germans that continues to exist.

The first half of this study is concerned with the early interactions between Czechs and Germans in the region that would become known as Czechoslovakia, beginning with the Habsburg Monarchy and ending with the foundation of the Third Czechoslovak Republic after World War II. Starting with the historical background of the Czech-German conflict of the mid-1940s is crucial to understanding why the two sides have come to such different conclusions about the events of the expulsions, because it provides essential context for the attitudes and emotions that surrounded the transfers. It might be convenient to extend the ethnic tensions of the twentieth century backwards

onto the Habsburg period, but, for much of their history together, Czechs and German coexisted quite peacefully in Bohemia. Simplifying history to a mere escalation of centuries-long hostilities overlooks the inherent uniqueness of the population transfers of the postwar period. On the other hand, the background of interaction between these two ethnic groups informed their more hostile relationship in the mid-twentieth century, and the significance of that background should not be ignored. The impact of the past on national and ethnic identity is especially important to this portion of the analysis, because the evolving Czech and German collective memories of life during the Habsburg Empire, the interwar period, and the Nazi occupation played a huge role in determining the ways in which these ethnic groups formed and interacted with one another.

The second half of this study examines personal narratives of the expulsions, recorded by the expellees themselves, in an attempt to shed light on the emotions and experiences of the people most affected by the expulsions. Combining the broader sweep of history with individual experiences will illuminate the ways in which subjectivity should be accepted in the field of history, as well as the way collective memory can change both history and national identity. Czechs and Germans have very different views of the expulsions, but they have also come to view the longer legacy of Czech-German relations in distinct ways, indicating the influence of their memories of the events of the mid-twentieth century on their national histories of earlier periods.

This study argues that the history leading up to the eventual physical separation of the Czech and German communities is essential to understanding what happened during the population transfers. It also sheds light on how individual and group memories can impact both national identity and history itself when they are brought together in a

collective narrative of a given moment in time. The very nature of recording an event or period of time inherently imbues it with the author's perspective. The audience for the written record produced by these authors will find that their points of view and preconceptions also shape their understanding of the events in question. There is no such thing as "objective" history in a case like this, and it is the goal of this study to heighten awareness of the roles perspective and subjectivity play in the development of this historical narrative. Both Czech and German perspectives will be presented, although the quantity of German sources means that the German point of view may outweigh the Czech. History in general could be described as widely-accepted collective memory, and looking at case studies of individual memories will show the ways in which collective memory has been constructed around a specific event, which is interpreted in various ways by different groups.

With all that said, this study begins with an examination of what is generally accepted as the history of the lands that became Czechoslovakia, with a particular emphasis on the relationship between Germans and Czechs in those lands.

## I. History of Ethnic Relations in Czechoslovakia, 1526-1945

In order to approach an understanding of the ethnic and national conflict between Czechs and Germans that exploded during the population transfers of 1945 and 1946, it is essential to examine the history between the two groups that informed the postwar hostility between them. As mentioned in the introduction, it is much too simplistic to project the tensions of the twentieth century backwards onto the Habsburg period and claim that Czech-German relations have always been volatile. While there were certainly episodes of revolt, repression, and some ethnic tensions, the nearly four centuries of Habsburg rule in the present-day Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as the relative lack of violence during that period, indicate that there was at least some measure of tolerance between the two groups. What, then, provoked the extreme reaction against ethnic Germans after World War II? There are a number of paths one could follow to find an answer to this complex question. First, by tracing the history of Czech-German relations throughout their long coexistence, one can identify those episodes of sporadic violence and repression that undoubtedly did leave their mark on Czech and German national identities and their interactions with one another. Second, examining the interwar years and the Nazi occupation reveals that a relatively short history of interaction played a pivotal role in the eventual expulsions. The approach this study will follow will look at both the long legacy and recent history of Czech-German relations to the end of World War II and find the strands and moments that shaped the ultimate division between Czechs and Germans in the mid-twentieth century.

Memories of both the centuries of interaction preceding World War I and the tension that built until the end of World War II undoubtedly shaped the postwar events

that will be covered in the next chapter, as well as the identities of both groups involved. Although the events described here are primarily based on information considered to be “fact,” there is always room for interpretation, and Czech and German historians and scholars have come to different conclusions about events that some might see as “objective” history. The history of Czech and German relations and its role in the events of the immediate postwar years is obviously essential to the analysis of those events, and therefore will be given full weight in this half of the study. By focusing on the “facts” of Czech-German history first, it will be even easier to see the impact of the historical background in light of what happened in the immediate aftermath of World War II.

In order to address these issues, this chapter will act as a historical overview, dealing with the most significant events and people who shaped Czech history, as well as the German role in that history. It would be entirely possible to write a book on the relationship between Czechs and Germans over the centuries, so this chapter is meant as more of a primer on the history of Czech-German interaction, both positive and negative. Particularly in the case of the Habsburg Empire, it will be necessary to abbreviate the discussion, in order to address the situation as a whole, rather than elaborating too much on relatively minor details.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, this discussion of the Habsburg Empire, the First Czechoslovak Republic, the Nazi regime, and the Third Czechoslovak Republic will be limited to the moments in history that are most significant to the shared history of Czechs and Germans in Czechoslovakia. Looking at the big picture in this way should reveal the larger trends in German-Czech relations throughout their coexistence in

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of the overview of the Habsburg period, Bohemia will be the focus. While Moravia and Silesia had different demographics and slightly different impacts on the history of the region, emphasizing Bohemia will not detract from the reader’s understanding of the significant events that took place in the Czech lands. It can be assumed that Bohemia, in many cases, will serve to stand for the Czech lands as a whole, if only for the sake of brevity.

Bohemia, although there will certainly be gaps, due simply to the fact that it is impossible to address every element of German and Czech cultural, political, and military interaction without writing a much lengthier account than this. It is my hope that these limitations will not detract from the readers' understanding of these events and their long-lasting consequences in terms of the more specific topic of this study, which is the rejection of Germans from Czech culture, politics, and national identity in the postwar period.

### Under the Double Eagle: The Habsburg Empire

The origin story of a nation is often one of the most significant elements in its collective identity, and the Czech nation is no different. When Czech nationalism grew in the nineteenth century, the nation needed a common origin in order to unify a vast population. Similar legends sprang up in many national movements, but the Czech legend, written by Cosmas of Prague in the twelfth century, involved the discovery of the Czech homeland by a leader named Čech. This land was paradisiacal, “a land subject to no one, filled with game and birds, flowing with sweet milk and honey.”<sup>2</sup> The resemblance to the promised land of biblical times is likely intentional, particularly because this story, like many origin stories, was intended to establish the Czechs as a people with a storied and legendary past. Cosmas' narrative was apparently effective in this regard, because it served its purpose of bringing the nation together in the face of the forces of disunity that could have torn it apart. It was written in the twelfth century, but its influence was especially evident during the eighteenth and nineteenth century rise of

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<sup>2</sup> Hugh Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of the Bohemian Crown* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2004) 9.

national consciousness, when collective memories of a legendary past assisted the development of distinct national groups.

Another early, yet essential, moment in the history of the Czech nation came during the Hussite rebellion against the Habsburgs in the fifteenth century. Jan Hus was a preacher and Czech religious reformer who was executed in 1415. His death sparked an uprising that lasted for decades and remains a major point of contention in Czech history. For the Czechs, it is hard to reconcile the violence and chaos that the Hussite wars brought with the ostensibly religious overtones of the original uprising. In the nineteenth century, Hus was venerated as an early nationalist, even though he was more concerned with the church than the state.<sup>3</sup> The appeal of the Hussite movement to many different types of people likely contributed to Hus' heroic status in the eyes of nationalists who were looking to achieve a similar goal. Regardless of how the Hussite wars are perceived, however, the tensions that were created and exacerbated by the Hussite wars likely played a role in the Bohemian period of the Thirty Years' War, which took place two centuries later. Indeed, religion played both a unifying and destructive force at various time in Czech history, particularly once the Habsburgs, with their resolute Catholicism, took power. That Habsburg connection to Catholicism was part of the reasoning behind glorifying Jan Hus as a Czech hero, because his religious beliefs did not conform to the Catholicism of the Czechs' German rulers and represented a kind of proto-Protestantism that the Czechs were very proud of.

The Habsburgs came to power in the lands of Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia in 1526 and the imposition of imperial power over those lands held consequences far into the future, even beyond the end of the empire in 1918. One of the areas where the

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<sup>3</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 39.

Habsburgs had a positive influence in Bohemia was in art and culture, because the vast expanse of the Habsburg Empire allowed for the easier transfer of ideas and styles, particularly during the Renaissance. Italian styles spread northward and were adapted for Czech purposes, allowing Czech artists and architects to develop their own uniquely Bohemian Renaissance style.<sup>4</sup> Czech art and literature experienced their own kind of renaissance, entering a “golden age” of Czech culture.<sup>5</sup> The Czech language began to be used in literary works and some authors became relatively well known. This renaissance may have contributed to a rise in national identity, since the Czechs could see themselves as separate to the German administration in culture and language, although many of members of the higher classes used German in both their everyday lives and their administrative tasks. German became the “primary second language” of many Czech nobles and knights under the Habsburgs, and the spread of German culture was not met with much resistance, as might be expected if there truly had been ethnic tensions for the entire period of Czech-German history.<sup>6</sup> Of course, the peaceful coexistence of Czech and German culture was mitigated by the rising political and religious tensions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which eventually erupted into war in the early seventeenth century.

The Thirty Years’ War began in 1618 in Prague, with the defenestration of several Habsburg governors through the windows of Prague Castle. Religious tensions between Catholics and Protestants, as well as uneven leadership by Emperor Rudolf II (r. 1576-1611) in dealing with the issues of religious difference, erupted in this uniquely Czech

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<sup>4</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 64.

<sup>5</sup> Kann, *A History*, 146.

<sup>6</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 63.



manifestation of frustration.<sup>7</sup> Rudolf II had sent a Letter of Majesty in 1609 granting relatively generous freedom of religion to all “nobles, burghers, and peasants,” but his successors, Matthias (r. 1611-1619) and Ferdinand II (r. 1617-1637), continued the centralizing and Catholicizing policies of former Habsburg rulers, angering the nobility.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the Czech nobility, who preferred their own chosen king, Frederick (r. 1619-1620), invalidated the election of the new Habsburg Emperor, namely Ferdinand, in August 1619 by invoking their power as electors. Frederick had the support of a large majority of the rebelling nobles in the region, but he became known as the “winter king” because he only ruled for a few brief months. The Bohemian diet had maintained the right to elect the king of Bohemia under the Habsburgs up to this point, and they were frustrated by attempts to undermine that power.<sup>9</sup> The upstart king and his supporters were defeated in 1620 at the Battle of White Mountain by Ferdinand and his commander, Count Tilly, who achieved “one of the most decisive victories ever obtained by Habsburg troops against an enemy.”<sup>10</sup> This victory was crucial to the development of the relationship between Germans and Czechs in Bohemia, because the Czech defeat at White Mountain later became a rallying point for Czech nationalism, despite the fact that there were Germans among the rebels as well. It is also significant that, unlike the Hussite wars, which appealed to many social classes, this revolution did not unite the

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<sup>7</sup> Robert A. Kann, *A History of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) 113. The Hussite Wars also featured a defenestration, so the First and Second Defenestration of Prague therefore mark two major turning points in Czech-German relations in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. It should also be noted that all dates pertaining to Habsburg rulers refer specifically to their reign as King or Queen of Bohemia, rather than their tenure as Holy Roman Emperor or Archduke of Austria.

<sup>8</sup> Kann, *A History*, 112.

<sup>9</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 57.

<sup>10</sup> Kann, *A History*, 50.

people, and therefore failed due to external pressures and internal disunity.<sup>11</sup> The cruel execution of twenty-seven of the nobles involved in the uprising of 1618 in Prague ended the Bohemian period of the Thirty Years' War.<sup>12</sup> Of course, the war would continue to rage for nearly three more decades, but with the defeat at White Mountain and the subsequent punishment of those responsible, the Bohemian region declined in significance in Habsburg foreign policy.

The military and political victory for the Habsburgs was crucial to their continued dominance in the region, but also created a divide between the triumphant German rulers and the vanquished Czech rebels, who faced a period of repression after their failed uprising and the eventual signing of the Treaty of Westphalia to end the Thirty Years' War in 1648. It is essential to remember that, while this event could be interpreted to show the growing national identity of the Czechs, the rebels were more concerned with the religious and political consequences of this war. The re-Catholicization of the Bohemian lands was done through education and religious orders, and the continuity of Catholic faith in Bohemia was emphasized.<sup>13</sup>

The redistribution of noble lands was also a problem for many Czechs, as “slightly more than one-half of all estates changed hands, and an even higher proportion of large ones,” which served to take away one of the main sources of power for Czech nobles.<sup>14</sup> While the Thirty Years' War continued to rage in other parts of Europe, the Czechs began to adjust to the post-defeat changes to Bohemia's position in the empire. After the Treaty of Westphalia, the balance of power shifted significantly towards the

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<sup>11</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 67.

<sup>12</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 69.

<sup>13</sup> R.J.W. Evans, *The making of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 223.

<sup>14</sup> Evans, *The making of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 197.

emperor within his own lands, even though the princes and nobility retained much of their power and the emperor actually lost some of his influence in the empire.<sup>15</sup> The power of the emperor over his lands in Bohemia was made relatively secure, however, and the resulting peace between the Czechs and the Germans in Bohemia lasted for several centuries.<sup>16</sup> A major consequence of the Treaty of Westphalia and the increased Habsburg control over Bohemia was the introduction of a new nobility by the triumphant empire, which rewarded its supporters with estates that had been confiscated from rebellious nobles.<sup>17</sup> This meant that the remaining Czech (and some German) noble families were either replaced or joined by new, Catholic nobles from other areas of Europe, which essentially wiped out the former Czech nobility of Bohemia. The introduction of these new nobles into the Bohemian lands likely assisted the Habsburgs in maintaining their power and contributed to the relative peace in Bohemia for about two centuries.

The changes made to administration and politics in Bohemia were significant after White Mountain. As Robert Kann writes, “What remained as a consequence until the end of the Habsburg empire was the permanent alienation of the Czechs.” This may be a bit of an overstatement, since the Czechs remained part of the empire until it was dissolved in the aftermath of World War I. It is true, however, that, even though many of the immediate consequences introduced by the Habsburgs faded over the years, “the indirect psychological ones remained.”<sup>18</sup> The Czech role in the Thirty Years’ War, though it was limited to two years of activity, and the Habsburg reaction to their

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<sup>15</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 71.

<sup>16</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 74. There was a peasant uprising in 1680, due to the excessive labor demands of the nobility, but there were no major revolutions or national movements until the spring of 1848.

<sup>17</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 72.

<sup>18</sup> Kann, *A History*, 51.

participation were crucial in shaping the next three centuries. According to Kann, “The era of suppression which affected Bohemia, Moravia, and in part Silesia, strengthened the consciousness of national identity.”<sup>19</sup> If the Battle of the White Mountain can be seen as the origin of Czech nationalism, it is also possible to see it as the origin of German-Czech tensions. Without the experiences of the Thirty Years’ War, it could be argued, it might have taken longer for Czech nationalism to take hold. Further, if the Habsburgs had not reacted so strongly to the rebellion of the Bohemian lands, turning them into “a mere dependency of Vienna,” it is possible that Czech-German tension would not have been so severe.<sup>20</sup> With the rise of nationalist movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it seems likely that a Czech consciousness would have developed anyway, but the fact that a relatively unified national identity was already beginning to form in the seventeenth century undoubtedly helped the Czechs assert themselves when they were finally given the chance to rule themselves in the twentieth century. The memory of the “German” victory at White Mountain was a powerful tool for nationalists and Czech politicians not only to differentiate German culture from Czech, but also to justify the later actions of Czechs against Germans in the aftermath of World War II. By putting the expulsions of the Germans in both a historical and a more immediate political context, the vengeful acts of the Czech guards and military against the German expellees could be rationalized on multiple levels by the Czech people and government.

After the defeat at White Mountain, “[t]he development and use of the Czech language among educated people...was severely restricted,” due to Habsburg fears of the

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<sup>19</sup> Kann, *A History*, 116.

<sup>20</sup> Evans, *The making of the Habsburg Monarchy*, 200.

power of Czech identity.<sup>21</sup> The earlier “golden age” of Czech art and literature was largely stopped, as the Habsburgs reasserted their power over Bohemia. Because German had been widely used before the war, it was likely not very difficult to get the educated elite to revert to using German in their written work. The idea that printed language is more powerful than mere speech is not a new concept, and the Habsburgs are certainly not the only ruling group in history to suppress the printing of a minority language in order to maintain power.<sup>22</sup> Habsburg fears, while understandable after the devastation of the Thirty Years’ War, cannot have improved Czech feelings towards their German rulers or their German neighbors.

Restrictions on the use of the Czech language only lasted so long, however, before a new Czech renaissance took hold among the intelligentsia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Before the Czechs could begin their cultural resurgence, though, they had to “revise and to rebuild their national language,” which took two generations to complete.<sup>23</sup> It took time to revive an apparently lost tradition of Czech literature, and it was not easy for the Czechs to overcome the obstacles presented by German dominance over their lives. In fact, the time between White Mountain and the reforms of Maria Theresa (r. 1740-1780) was referred to as a “time of darkness” by many Czechs, due to the execution and exile of many leading Czech intellectuals after the war was over.<sup>24</sup> Theater, music, and history all contributed to the resurgence of Czech culture in Bohemia

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<sup>21</sup> Kann, *A History*, 384.

<sup>22</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006) 45. Anderson argues that printed language is crucial to creating a nation. He gives the example of the Thai government’s discouragement of promoting a written language among minority tribes, even though the government does not seem to care what the minorities speak in their everyday lives, to show the emphasis many nations place on printed over spoken language.

<sup>23</sup> Kann, *A History*, 384.

<sup>24</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 75.

and Moravia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, at least until the revolution of 1848 was crushed and German hegemony was reestablished.

While the redevelopment of Czech culture appears to be a national movement to modern eyes, especially because it involved the reintroduction of Czech as a language of intellectual and artistic pursuits, it was not always perceived as an inherently nationalistic development by the people responsible for the revival. In fact, in the process of reconversion to Catholicism, Czech was often used to appeal to people who did not know Latin or could not speak German.<sup>25</sup> The Habsburgs were generally more concerned with religious unity than linguistic uniformity, and therefore, in order to attract as many people as possible to the Catholic Church, Czech was spoken, particularly in rural areas where German and Latin would not have succeeded. The methods they used to ease reconversion meant that later accusations of “forced conversions” in Bohemia by Czech nationalists are oversimplified and inaccurate. Most Czechs rejoined the Catholic Church and behaved as ordinary Catholics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with little conflict.

The revival of the spoken Czech language during the Baroque period was more of a cultural movement than a nationalistic one, since saving the language from extinction was a way of preserving an element of Bohemian culture that was being neglected.<sup>26</sup> The elites still used German, because it was the language of the empire, which meant that major works were not generally written in Czech in the eighteenth century, and therefore led to the delay of the development of a significant vernacular literature in Bohemia until

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<sup>25</sup> Evans, *The making of the Habsburg Empire*, 229.

<sup>26</sup> Evans, *The making of the Habsburg Empire*, 230-231.

the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> This delay was primarily due to the omnipresence of German in the culture of the region, as well as the restrictions placed upon the Czechs after the Thirty Years' War. It is important to remember, however, that favoring one language over the other did not necessarily create noticeable tension between Germans and Czechs, despite the dominance of the Habsburgs and the general lack of Czech literature.<sup>28</sup> At this point in Czech-German history, language was not such a contentious marker of nationality as it would become in later years. Nationality, too, as it was only just forming in any meaningful way, was not yet the primary identity of the people living in the Czech lands.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Bohemian lands were hardly the primary concern of the Habsburg rulers, but territorial changes in the region were fairly common and often had unforeseen consequences in Bohemia. For instance, the annexation of Silesia by Prussia in 1763 led to the loss of a large portion of the German population of that region, which may have created "more favorable conditions for the future revival of the Czech language and culture" by allowing the Czech majority in Bohemia and Moravia to assert itself more freely.<sup>29</sup> The later partitions of Poland, the Napoleonic wars, and the policies of "enlightened absolutists" like Maria Theresa and Joseph II (r. 1765-1790) led to further changes in Bohemia. The partitions of Poland in the late eighteenth century created tensions between Prussia, Russia, and Austria, all of whom wanted pieces of the dismembered state, particularly when Austria was left out of the second partition. The partitions led directly into the Napoleonic wars, after which

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<sup>27</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 77.

<sup>28</sup> Evans, *The making of the Habsburg Empire*, 231.

<sup>29</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 85.

Austria was granted the piece of Poland that it had wanted in the first place.<sup>30</sup> The Napoleonic wars were a military reaction against the chaos of the French Revolution and Napoleon's sudden rise to power, and defeating him in 1814 united the powers of Europe, even though their unity could not prevent the destruction of the Holy Roman Empire in the face of his coronation as Emperor of the French in 1804.<sup>31</sup> Such unity between European powers would not be possible again until the outbreak of World War I, although that war found many of these former allies on opposite sides of the front.

The influence of Maria Theresa and her successors on the culture and political structure of Bohemia cannot be overlooked. The changes in education, administration, and religion were significant enough to signal the end of the "time of darkness" that had existed in Bohemia since the defeat at White Mountain. Compulsory elementary education, as well as improved secondary schools, provided equal opportunities for all students to learn basic reading, writing, and arithmetic, no matter their social station.<sup>32</sup> Most instruction was in German, but the vernacular was not entirely discounted. The changes in administration and economic relations were even more significant, however, because they centralized the administration of the empire and attempted to remove some of the most significant elements of social and economic inequality. For instance, Joseph II abolished serfdom in 1781, which freed the peasants from their landlords and allowed them to live more freely in the empire.<sup>33</sup> Finally, the enlightened absolutists began to allow some religious dissent, instead of maintaining the adamant Catholicism of their predecessors. Joseph II not only granted toleration to Lutherans and Calvinists in 1781,

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<sup>30</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 95,97.

<sup>31</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 96-97.

<sup>32</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 89.

<sup>33</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 92.



but also loosened many of the restrictions on the Jewish population, allowing them to leave the ghettos and stop wearing the distinctive clothing that had separated them from the rest of society.<sup>34</sup> These policies were part of a rationalist and enlightened worldview and helped the Habsburg rulers maintain their control over the empire, especially in a region like Bohemia, where economic and religious tensions had previously erupted into rebellion.

The French Revolution, despite the fact that it occurred far from Prague or Vienna, sent shockwaves through the Habsburg Empire, and the fear that such an event could happen in Austria or Bohemia led to increased censorship and restrictions by the Habsburgs. Those restrictions did not prevent the resurgence of Czech culture that had begun in the seventeenth century and continued throughout the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Despite increased scrutiny of books and newspapers produced in Czech, Czech came to be seen as the natural mother tongue of the Czech people, which helped the use of Czech in literature gain some momentum.<sup>35</sup> The development of Romanticism across Europe also contributed to the rise in literature in the vernacular, due to its emphasis on patriotism and nationalism. Advocates of the Czech language attempted to assist those in the countryside in improving their Czech speech, which helped them become incorporated into the Czech nation. In fact, by including the common people, rather than the elites, who still preferred to use German, the Czechs were redefining the concept of who belonged to the nation. Since the common people and the middle classes were using Czech, and since speaking Czech had become one of the main requirements for determining who belonged to the nation, the idea of the nation was

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<sup>34</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 91.

<sup>35</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 100, 102.

transforming into a popular movement.<sup>36</sup> This popular element of Czech nationalism would never fully fade and continued to play a huge role in the national identity of Czechoslovakia after its foundation. The nationalist focus on Czech language and culture would only grow until the spring of 1848, when numerous regions erupted in rebellion, advocating their own autonomy and desire to rule themselves.

In the 1830s, several regions around Europe began to voice their discontent, including Bohemia. The Bohemian nobility was unhappy with their level of autonomy, but nationalist movements became the real threat to Habsburg power, since they appealed to such a large segment of the population. The nobility linked themselves to the nationalist cause in order to achieve their political and constitutional goals. Adding to the nationalists' complaints was the mandatory use of German, particularly in schools in areas that were predominantly Czech.<sup>37</sup> Because the Czech national movement was based so strongly in language, the use of German was seen as an affront to their national identity. In order to combat the dominance of German, Czech nationalists started studying the history of their language, and they even "found" manuscripts that proved the ancient presence of Czech as a language even before German had been recorded.<sup>38</sup> Advocating not only the use of Czech by peasants, but also its legitimacy as a written language in this way reinforced Czech nationalists' sense of the uniqueness of their culture and its rightful independence from German or Austrian culture. Therefore, by 1848, when the tensions between the empire and the people of Bohemia reached their

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<sup>36</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 100.

<sup>37</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 109.

<sup>38</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 110, 113. The manuscripts in question included epic and lyric verse and were said to be dated before the German *Nibelungenlied*, but they are now widely regarded as fakes.

breaking point, the Czechs had a defined national consciousness that they were willing to defend.

While it might seem that this development of a Czech national identity would be the beginning of serious Czech-German tensions and hostility, the Czechs were more concerned with the Habsburgs than their German neighbors. In fact, there was a sense of “national cooperation” in 1848, with Germans and Czech coming together to advocate ethnic equality in Bohemia.<sup>39</sup> Both groups identified strongly with Bohemia and were not interested in separating from each other, but rather wanted to have some autonomy from the Habsburgs. There were, of course, differences between Germans and Czechs, particularly in an economic sense, since the Germans found themselves holding much of the capital of the country, making them much wealthier than their Czech neighbors. The Germans also felt that Bohemia was an inherently German land, due to its historical ties to the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburgs, and therefore assumed that it would remain under the control of Germans, rather than Czechs.<sup>40</sup> Despite these differences, though, they were able to continue cooperating with the Czechs in pursuit of more autonomy and equality in Bohemia, and little tension made itself obvious at this point, except over the issue of uniting with Germany or keeping Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia separate from the German state.<sup>41</sup> Thus, even after national identity became a major factor in the lives of Czechs and Germans in Bohemia, hostility did not immediately develop. They were able to live peacefully together for another fifty years before nationality became a wedge that drove them permanently apart.

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<sup>39</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 118.

<sup>40</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 114-115.

<sup>41</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 118.

The revolutions across Europe in the spring of 1848 could be seen as the inevitable consequence of nationalist movements that developed in the nineteenth century. After 1848, the Habsburgs made numerous changes to administration and political life. The dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary was established in 1867 to appease the Hungarian rebels, but the Czechs, many of whom had remained relatively loyal to the empire throughout this period of upheaval, were given “unity ‘from above,’” rather than the constitutional union they had sought.<sup>42</sup> For the Czechs, who saw their national identity as having roots as far back as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the desire to see their national feeling come to fruition was particularly significant, especially when the effort failed and they were again held under the strict control of the Habsburg Empire.

After the failure of the revolutions, the Czechs felt unfairly treated for their participation in the rebellions of 1848 and blamed the Germans for the “oppressive character of the government.”<sup>43</sup> This instance of laying collective blame on all Germans for the actions of those in power is interesting, particularly in light of the expulsions, during which a similar phenomenon took place. The collective guilt of the Germans assumed by the Czechs after World War II, as well as the collective innocence of the Sudeten Germans in their understanding of the events of the occupation, fundamentally shaped the way the two groups remember the expulsions of 1945 and 1946. Similar attitudes were displayed in the aftermath of 1848. Part of the reason for this application of collective guilt may have stemmed from the fact that the Germans were undoubtedly favored under the Habsburgs. While they may not have been able to do anything about this partiality, it is hard to believe that they would protest the preferential treatment they

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<sup>42</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 124.

<sup>43</sup> Kann, *A History*, 316.

received in comparison to their Czech neighbors. The negative feelings of the Czechs towards the Germans did not become violent, however, and the two groups were still able to coexist. Because the Habsburgs did not want to continue dealing with Czech uprisings or upset the Czech population further, they made “moderate concessions” to appease the Czechs, but these concessions did not give the Czechs the power they desired to effect real changes in their homeland.

It is important to note here that before World War I, national movements within the Habsburg Empire were not primarily concerned with breaking away from the empire, but rather were looking to assert themselves *within* the empire.<sup>44</sup> The continued maturation of the Czech national movement and Czech culture contributed to the Czech ability to challenge the Germans once World War I was over. It is also interesting to note that feelings of national tension often came from Germans, who feared the changes they saw in Czech culture. This fear likely sprang from the fact that the Czechs were so adamant about using their national language and celebrating Czech culture, so the Germans may have feared that Czech culture would eclipse German as the dominant force in the region.

The German population of Bohemia was also generally considered to include the Jewish population, who were identified more strongly with German culture than Czech.<sup>45</sup> This identification of the Jewish population with that of the Germans would actually survive the Nazi occupation, with many Jews being expelled alongside the Sudeten Germans, despite the fact that the Jews had suffered more than any other group under the Nazis. Under the Habsburgs, the Jewish population was relatively integrated into Czech

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<sup>44</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 146.

<sup>45</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 156-157.

and German culture, particularly after Joseph II opened the ghettos. Of course, the Habsburgs were not always especially tolerant of Jewish people, with Maria Theresa's expulsion of 20,000 Jews from Prague pointing to the presence of genuine intolerance.<sup>46</sup> Maria Theresa did rule before Joseph, and therefore her policies were not always as "enlightened" as those of her successors, but the fact remains that the Jewish population was left somewhat removed from both Czech and German culture, even after the opening of the ghettos.

There was assimilation, particularly in Prague and Vienna, but there was an undercurrent of anti-Semitism that made fully identifying with either the Czech or German population a tricky feat for a Jewish person.<sup>47</sup> It was relatively easy before 1890 for Jews to assimilate and move between the German and Czech communities, since many members of the Jewish community were bilingual, but full identification with either group was difficult to achieve or maintain. There were also numerous enclaves of Jewish communities across the Czech lands, which provided security for the Jewish populations that lived there, particularly after 1890, when anti-Semitism began to grow again. As nationalism grew, the Jews were increasingly left out of both the German and Czech communities, which increasingly used race as a major factor in determining nationality.<sup>48</sup> There was no official sanction of anti-Semitism by the government of the empire, but the difficulties faced by Jewish citizens of Bohemia were very real, even before the Nazis invaded with their ideology of extermination.

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<sup>46</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 90.

<sup>47</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 200.

<sup>48</sup> Chad Bryant, *Prague in Black: Nazi Rule and Czech Nationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) 16-17.

World War I brought the fall of the Habsburg Empire, with the lands that had once been included in the vast expanses of Austria-Hungary suddenly divided into sections that were intended to follow the ideal of “national self-determination.” While it is fairly easy to see why the victorious powers would want to dismantle one of the defeated states to remove its power base, they forgot that the people who had formerly lived under the Habsburgs had been held together by little more than the force of the emperor (or empress) and his central authority. While democratizing and allowing the people to rule themselves seemed like a good idea, most of the population had never considered living in a world without the Habsburgs in control. The majority-minority relations in the Habsburg Empire were tense, certainly, but the singular persona of the ruler was enough to keep things running fairly smoothly. That ruler did have other sources of unity in the bureaucracy, military, and Catholic Church, but the symbolic value of the figure of the ruler should not be ignored.<sup>49</sup> Taking away the central power and splitting up the lands, seemingly haphazardly in some cases, was a recipe for disaster. The desire to achieve fully self-determined states in Central Europe was essentially impossible to achieve in reality, because of the widespread mixing of ethnic groups in the region that had been present for centuries.<sup>50</sup> The establishment of the First Czechoslovak Republic under President Tomáš Masaryk was the work of the victorious powers, particularly France and the United States, and the later history between those powers would reflect the repercussions of the actions of these so-called Great Powers when they no longer wished to protect a country they were responsible for forming.

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<sup>49</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 126.

<sup>50</sup> Konrad Henlein, “The German Minority in Czechoslovakia,” *International Affairs*, 15, no. 4 (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1936) 566.

Beyond even the political issues with dividing up the Habsburg lands, it is important to recognize the cultural shifts that took place with the establishment of borders and states based on “nationhood.” As Kann explains, the coexistence of Czech and German culture under the Habsburgs created a “mutual Czech-German cultural penetration, a kind of osmosis.”<sup>51</sup> This “osmosis” linked the Czech and Sudeten German cultures together and made it difficult to separate one from the other. In fact, the nationalities of composers of pieces of music written in the Bohemian lands are difficult to determine, because “in Bohemian lands German or Czech names are no reliable clues in this respect.”<sup>52</sup> The intertwining cultures of Czechs and Germans was one of the main reasons the two groups were able to coexist for such a long time, even though there were occasions on which the Czechs reacted violently to the preference given to Germans. Sometimes, those intertwining cultures could even be found within a single person. The violence that occurred between the two groups was more about equality than supremacy, however, and the dominance of German culture, while unfair to the Czechs, made sense in an empire that was ruled by German-speakers. The coexistence and intermingling of Czech and German culture helped smooth over some of the differences and both cultures influenced each other in ways both conscious and unconscious.

One of the most overlooked casualties of World War I is the death of that cultural coexistence in the “new state in which the primacy of Czech culture was firmly established.”<sup>53</sup> Again, it is understandable that the Czechs would want to use their newfound power to express their national culture and celebrate the artistic and literary creations of their countrymen. On the other hand, cutting off the “osmosis” stream

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<sup>51</sup> Kann, *A History*, 523.

<sup>52</sup> Kann, *A History*, 387.

<sup>53</sup> Kann, *A History*, 538.



between Czech and German culture only added to existing ethnic tensions and may have contributed to the rise of the Sudeten German Party, with its emphasis on German culture as supreme.

### The Myth of National Self-Determination: The First Czechoslovak Republic

#### *Establishment of the First Republic*

The idea of “self-determination” for the nations that had formerly been included in the Habsburg Empire was a good one, in theory. In practice, however, the ethnic and national groups in the region were so hopelessly mixed that there was no conceivable way to ensure that a given state was entirely homogeneous. The centuries-long rule of the Habsburgs had enabled the movement of various ethnic groups throughout the former lands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which made determining borders extremely delicate and contentious. The borders determined by the victorious states were imposed on a region that had been unified through specific institutions for centuries. Taking away those institutions, including the emperor and the military, allowed disputes to emerge that might not have been so difficult to manage in previous years. For instance, Hungary disputed the boundaries of the new state of Czechoslovakia, and sought to change the borders determined at Versailles, particularly in the case of Slovakia, which had a large Hungarian minority.<sup>54</sup> This attempt was unsuccessful, but the tension between the established boundaries and the boundaries perceived to be “correct” by various ethnic groups would continue to plague the region for decades. Disputes such as this were only to be expected, because of the increased national consciousness that had arisen in the

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<sup>54</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 176-177.

previous century and the seemingly arbitrary assignation of certain territories to new states.

Because the borders of Czechoslovakia were decided by the victorious states, there was little that minority groups could do, since the so-called Great Powers had the strength to enforce their decisions. Two decades after the end of World War I, the states of Central Europe would have to face the possibility that, while the Great Powers could defend their decisions, they might choose not to do so. Regardless of what happened in later years, the perception in the immediate aftermath of the war was that the states formed through the Treaty of Versailles, as well as all the conditions of surrender imposed on Germany, were inviolable.

Beyond even the mere coexistence of different ethnic groups, the comingling and combining of the cultures of those groups further confused attempts to separate unique nationalities from each another. As discussed in the previous section, Czech and German culture informed one another, and the expression of an affinity for one or the other language or culture was not seen, at least in this period, as a tacit rejection of the other. In fact, nationality was so fluid in the pre-World-War-II period that “amphibians,” or people who could switch nationalities in public settings, were relatively common in Czechoslovakia.<sup>55</sup> These amphibians blurred the lines between German and Czech nationality and culture, to the point that separating the two was, in many cases, simply a matter of context. Amphibians saw nationality as a publicly expressed construction, rather than an innate identity, and it was therefore much easier in the prewar period to choose a nationality based on cultural signifiers, rather than other factors such as race or

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<sup>55</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 3.

primary language.<sup>56</sup> Most individuals were not conflicted about their identity, because their culture allowed for the expression of multiple identities in the public sphere. In later periods, this kind of amphibian identity would be essentially destroyed by the Nazis and Czechs, as they attempted to impose a single national identity on people who had previously been able to select their own nationality based on their actions, rather than their genealogy.

Before getting to the issues of amphibians in the Nazi period and the Third Republic, however, it is essential to understand how Nazism was able to gain a foothold in Czechoslovakia and how Hitler was able to dismember the Czechoslovak state so easily. It could be argued that the Czechoslovak Republic was doomed from the start, since it was a country with such large and vocal minorities, but the original constitution of the First Republic and its early actions indicate that, given slightly more time and better leadership, Czechoslovakia could have dealt with its ethnic tensions and matured out of its initial difficulties. Some of those difficulties included ethnic problems, of course, but it is also crucial to remember that most Czechoslovakian politicians had never participated in their own government before. They had certainly represented their people under the Habsburgs, but they had “more experience in parliamentary obstruction than in responsible government,” which made the early government an exercise in bureaucracy and something of a cult of personality around the new president, Tomáš Masaryk.<sup>57</sup>

Masaryk was a naturally charismatic leader for the new republic, and his presence smoothed the transition from monarchy to democracy by allowing the Czechs and Germans in the region to continue revering a single man, rather than jumping directly

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<sup>56</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 4.

<sup>57</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 175.

into fully representative government. There was, of course, representation in government, but the proportional representation mandated by the constitution meant that multiparty coalitions were inevitable and no single party was likely to become a majority.<sup>58</sup>

Although the democracy of Czechoslovakia remained fairly stable at the beginning of its existence, in spite of this possible stumbling block, Masaryk aided the transition by providing some continuity from the former empire to the contemporary republic.

Even with Masaryk uniting Czechs and Slovaks under his rule, the state inherently favored those groups over Hungarians, Germans, and Jews, simply because of its identity as a “Czechoslovak Republic.” Minorities, including the Sudeten Germans, were given the right to use their own language in schools and official business in areas where they made up more than twenty percent of the population, but “Czechoslovak” was the official state language, and therefore, anyone who could not speak Czech or Slovak likely found it difficult to work in the bureaucracy or government.<sup>59</sup> While the insistence on Czech and Slovak as official languages makes sense in a nation that was still trying to establish itself as a legitimate state, it is also possible to see why the Germans might have felt threatened by the increasing infiltration of Czechs into their former linguistic and cultural enclaves. Czechs and Slovaks were making their voices legitimately heard in the political sphere for the first time, and their control of the government gave them the potential to control the cultural life of the population. After centuries of being the dominant cultural group under the Habsburgs, this transition was difficult for Sudeten Germans to make.

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<sup>58</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 180.

<sup>59</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 18. Bryant points out that not only were Germans who could not speak Czech losing their jobs, but Czechs were also “colonizing” jobs in Slovakia to dominate the state in all regions.

Much of the fear of a Czech cultural takeover was overblown, however, because the Czech government had shown no signs of attempting to destroy German culture, and had actually signed the Minorities Treaty at its inception. This treaty gave minority groups protection under the League of Nations and was intended to protect groups like the Sudeten Germans from persecution.<sup>60</sup> It is not clear exactly how this treaty would have worked, particularly because it was not invoked by the Sudeten Germans in their quest for cultural security. The existence of this treaty as protection for the Sudeten Germans, however, should have given them at least some security in their new position as a minority. Despite the perceived threat of Czech culture, it is important to note that there was little unrest between Germans and Czechs during the early years of the First Republic. The political and cultural groups and parties that developed in the late 1920s and early 1930s had not yet emerged, and the Germans were far from uniting as a group. Indeed, the shadows of a cultural threat had not yet solidified into the propagandized force of unification and were little more than a slight suspicion on the part of the Sudeten Germans of the early 1920s.

The First Republic got off to a relatively smooth start, benefiting from the fact that Germans and Czechs had coexisted for such a long time. Democracy did begin to take root, even if it took slightly longer than some might have liked. The real challenge for the new republic came with the Great Depression and its attendant misery and suffering, which assisted the rise of Konrad Henlein and his Sudeten German movement.

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<sup>60</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 178.

### *Konrad Henlein and the Rise of the Sudetendeutsche Partei*

Konrad Henlein is one of the most controversial and confounding figures in the First Czechoslovak Republic. He can easily be portrayed as a conniving leader, an ineffective decision-maker, or a tool of Hitler, and it remains unclear what his “real” role was. He was the leader of the Sudetendeutsche Partei (SdP), which claimed to represent all Sudeten Germans. After the annexation of the Sudetenland in 1938 and the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia the following year, Henlein was perceived as an active Nazi supporter who had been steering Czechoslovakia into Hitler’s grasp since he came to power. It is too simple to portray him as a villain, however, because, by many accounts, he was not a very effective leader, and he was not actively trying to destroy the Czechoslovak Republic from the very beginning of his organization in 1933. Rather, he was a Sudeten German activist who apparently got caught up in the chaos that surrounded him and ended up acting as an instrument to accomplish Hitler’s plans in Central Europe.

The roots of Henlein’s movement can be found in the worldwide Great Depression of the 1930s, which hit the Sudeten Germans particularly hard. Their industries, which often dealt with light, consumer goods, were affected “first and most heavily.” The challenges presented by the Depression led to increased radicalization and polarization in the government.<sup>61</sup> Economic concerns, as well as the continued dominance of Czech culture over German, led many Sudeten Germans to feel threatened by the Czech state and resentful of their Czech neighbors. The political dominance of Czech parties only exacerbated this perceived threat, by showing how much power the Czechs really had. The impact of the Depression drove many Germans to search for a uniting force that could protect them against the economic, political, and cultural

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<sup>61</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 190.

onslaught they perceived in the world around them. Many of them found unity by joining German organizations or the Sudeten German National Socialist Party (DNSAP). The DNSAP was an indigenous Nazi movement in Czechoslovakia and was not originally directly associated with Hitler's Nazi Party in Germany. Some members were interested in Hitler's brand of politics, but the party itself was not directly related to its German fellow at this point. The DNSAP was dissolved, however, in 1933, and banned by the government, to prevent the rise of a real challenge to the republic.<sup>62</sup> Part of the reason for this dissolution was probably the rise of Hitler's Nazi Party in Germany, which had shown the political potential of the National Socialist movement. After the Nazi Party was abolished in Czechoslovakia, the Sudeten Germans looked to a new organization to unite them in the face of all the challenges in their environment. That organization was Konrad Henlein's Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront (SHF), which later became the SdP.

The SHF was originally an organization that focused on uniting the Sudeten Germans in the cultural sphere, but it was not initially focused on any Nazi ideology. The primary concern of the SHF, at least at the beginning of its existence, was the formation of a Sudeten German identity that was distinct from both the Czechs and the "Reich Germans."<sup>63</sup> In this field, the SHF was successful, as the identity of the Sudeten Germans is still relatively unified and their sense of belonging to a distinct group of ethnic Germans never disappeared, even during the Nazi occupation. The emphasis the SHF placed on the formation of Sudeten identity indicates that the SHF was not looking to secede from Czechoslovakia or join the Reich in 1933, but rather wanted to defend their

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<sup>62</sup> Ronald M. Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem: 1933-1938* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1975) 52.

<sup>63</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 62. The term "Reich Germans" refers to Germans living within the borders of Germany before World War II, and serves to differentiate Sudeten Germans (and other ethnic German groups in diaspora) from Germans from Germany.

traditions against the perceived threat of assimilation to Czech culture. It is in this arena that the figure of Henlein begins to take shape as something of a puzzle. His original purpose was to unite the Sudeten Germans within Czechoslovakia, but he ended up leading them into the Reich by 1938. This image of Henlein “leading” his people into the Reich may actually be too generous to his leadership abilities, because, by all accounts, he was not a very effective or charismatic leader.<sup>64</sup> It seems more likely that Henlein was an aspiring cultural leader who became part of a political movement that he did not fully understand before it overwhelmed him and made him practically irrelevant. Before that could happen, however, he became the leader of the SdP, which was essentially the SHF transformed into a viable political party. The idea of a Sudeten German “front” had frightened the Czechs, so Henlein was obliged to change the name of his organization to a “party” before they were allowed to participate in the political sphere.<sup>65</sup> Thus, by 1935, Henlein was already leading a party that was poised to represent all Sudeten Germans in a completely legitimate way within the established government.

It would be tempting, once again, to claim that, when Henlein became the leader of the SdP, he was already planning to betray the Czech government and dismember Czechoslovakia for the sake of Hitler’s cause. In hindsight, it is also possible to see his speeches in the mid-1930s, including one he gave at a rally in 1934, just six months before the formation of the SdP, as mere tools to keep the Czechs from suspecting his true motives.<sup>66</sup> It may be plausible that he was already planning the Sudeten secession from the republic, but it is not likely, simply because there was no reason in 1935 to believe that the Reich even wanted to annex the Sudetenland or risk antagonizing

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<sup>64</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 68.

<sup>65</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 102-103.

<sup>66</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 101.



Czechoslovakia or its allies. Instead, the Sudeten Germans were probably just looking for someone who represented their interests, and Henlein fit that description better than any of the other parties available to them.

Henlein was, at least in 1935, primarily concerned with carrying out his mandate from the Sudeten Germans and doing what he could to create unity among them.<sup>67</sup> He even tried to work with other parties in the government to create a coalition. When that effort fell through, however, the SdP essentially stopped participating in democratic government and separated themselves from the rest of the Czechoslovakian political parties. From 1935 to the annexation of the Sudetenland in 1938, the political participation of the SdP decreased, while its connections to Hitler's Nazi Party grew. This separation may have contributed to radical calls for a real secession from Czechoslovakia, but such drastic action was still not a viable option at this point.<sup>68</sup> Henlein was left to attempt to unify his people without antagonizing the Czechs, and he continued to profess his loyalty to the state, even though he also began speaking against the policies of the state that seemed to favor Czechs and Slovaks over Germans.

In 1936, Henlein made an impassioned argument for the rights of the Sudeten Germans, claiming that, despite the fact that there were roughly half as many Germans as Czechs, and nearly twice as many Germans as Slovaks, in Czechoslovakia, Germans were treated as second-class citizens.<sup>69</sup> On the other hand, he continued to claim that he and his party were loyal members of the state and that, while the Czechs had treated them

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<sup>67</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 120. The SdP won 60% of the Sudeten German vote in 1935, but it was not advocating *Anschluss* as a part of its political platform at that point, so the Germans who voted for Henlein were likely not considering that idea while they were voting.

<sup>68</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 133-135.

<sup>69</sup> Henlein, "The German Minority," 562. At the time, there were roughly three million Germans, seven million Czechs, and two million Slovaks in Czechoslovakia.

unfairly, “the blame” for the contemporary state of ethnic relations “rest[ed] with both nations.”<sup>70</sup> This acceptance of some responsibility for the growing tensions between Czechs and Germans may have been a ploy to convince both the Czech government and the potential allies of the Sudeten Germans abroad, particularly among the British, that the Sudeten Germans simply felt oppressed by the government. The British government certainly believed Henlein when he told them of his people’s struggles in Czechoslovakia and trusted his claims that he was still entirely loyal to the republic. The willingness of the British to jump to the defense of the Sudeten Germans against perceived Czech tyranny may have contributed to the audaciousness of Hitler’s continued violations of the Treaty of Versailles. He had already successfully remilitarized the Rhineland and likely saw the British support of the Sudeten Germans as a way to achieve his goal of conquering Czechoslovakia with little resistance.<sup>71</sup> Whether Henlein was actively cooperating with Hitler at this point is unclear, but it is true that, as divisions erupted in the SdP, Henlein began to rely on the Reich for support.<sup>72</sup> That support may have been the opening Hitler later used to manipulate the SdP into becoming an extension of the Nazi Party into Czechoslovakia.

By 1937, the SdP had radicalized to the point that Henlein had only two options left: “elimination or cooption.”<sup>73</sup> A large part of this radicalization came from the increasing influence of Hitler and the Reich Germans, particularly in terms of Heinrich Himmler’s *Schutzstaffel* (SS). Himmler used the members of his organization to infiltrate not only the SdP, but many ethnic German organizations, and he was therefore able to

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<sup>70</sup> Henlein, “The German Minority,” 561.

<sup>71</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 143, 148.

<sup>72</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 158.

<sup>73</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 190.

gain some measure of control over their activities and ideology.<sup>74</sup> The permeation of militant SS members into the SdP contributed to its radicalization as annexation approached, but the final step towards direct collaboration with the Nazis required Henlein to decide on his role in the process. Henlein chose to be co-opted by the Nazis and their radical allies within his own party, remaining the symbol of Sudeten unity, even as the party was increasingly dominated by men like Karl Frank, who were much more radical and loyal to Nazi ideology. In addition to the SS penetration of the SdP, the rise of radical Sudeten Germans like Frank hastened the escalation of ideology towards annexation by the Reich. Henlein's inability to maintain control of his organization, despite his symbolic value, meant that he was wholly incapable of preventing this escalation.

Because of his role in this period of Sudeten German history, Henlein is often seen as a traitor to the Czechoslovak Republic, which is, to some degree, a fair assessment. He did not fight for the preservation of the state, but after his many speeches decrying the policies of the Czech government, that sudden change of heart would not have made sense to anyone and could have cost him what support he still had among the Sudeten Germans. It is an overstatement to say, however, that Henlein was the "Führer" of the Sudeten Germans, because he never had that much control over what went on in the Sudetenland, especially after Hitler became involved.<sup>75</sup> Henlein had never been a particularly effective leader, and as the radical elements in his party continued to rise in power, he likely felt overwhelmed and looked to a more stable leader to help him keep the position he held. Henlein may have seen the Reich Nazi Party as a valuable tool to

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<sup>74</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 178.

<sup>75</sup> Radomír Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans: A Study of Czech-German Relations, 1933-1962* (New York: New York University Press, 1964) 94.

assist him in his attempts to create and maintain unity among the Sudeten Germans within Czechoslovakia.

Instead of using the Nazi Party to maintain his power, however, the Nazis actually used Henlein to advance their own goals in Central Europe. As time passed, Hitler continued to gain confidence that France and Great Britain would not protest the changes he wished to make to the political boundaries of a number of states. In March 1938, he successfully completed the *Anschluss* with Austria, which had been explicitly forbidden by the Treaty of Versailles, and which provoked strong feelings among both Czechs and Germans in Czechoslovakia. The Czechs feared being outflanked by Nazi Germany and the Sudeten Germans flew into a frenzy of nationalistic excitement, likely hoping that they would be next to join the Reich.<sup>76</sup> By this point, annexation was certainly on the minds of many Sudeten Germans, largely due to the escalation of radicalism in the Sudeten German movement and the encouragement of that radicalism by the Nazis. It was certainly in Hitler's best interest to encourage the "fifth column" of Sudeten Germans to express their anti-Czech feelings, although it is not certain that Hitler saw the Sudeten Germans as a significant base of support at this point.<sup>77</sup> In fact, it is likely he did not care whether the Sudeten Germans were looking to secede, because he fully intended to annex the territory of Czechoslovakia regardless of the feelings of the population that lived there.

In 1938, not only was Austria annexed by the Reich, but Henlein began working with both Frank and Hitler directly, marking the first documented moment of his total complicity with the Reich Nazi Party and their plans for the annexation of the

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<sup>76</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 213-214.

<sup>77</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 209.

Sudetenland and the later creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Henlein met with Hitler, who told him that “We must always demand so much that we can never be satisfied.”<sup>78</sup> In terms of Henlein’s negotiations with the Czech government on behalf of the Sudeten Germans, this meant that he had to demand enough that the government could never fulfill his demands, but not so much that they would cut off negotiations entirely. This was essential, because everyone was concerned with preventing another war, but the Czechs were relatively unwilling to concede too much to the Germans, for fear that they would break away or become too powerful a force in Czechoslovakia. To achieve this delicate balance, Henlein created the Eight Demands of the Karlsbad Program, which appeared to simply demand German autonomy, but, if accepted by the Czech government, “would have been tantamount to union with Germany.”<sup>79</sup> Because most European countries were primarily concerned with preventing another war, there was immense pressure on the Czech government simply to give in. The pressure eventually got to be so bad that Edvard Beneš was forced to begin giving major concessions to the Sudeten Germans. Beneš had taken over after President Masaryk had died the previous year, and his presidency before Munich was overshadowed by the increasing tensions between the Sudeten Germans and the rest of the state.<sup>80</sup> The concessions Beneš was forced to make were so extensive that refusing to accept them would have destroyed Henlein’s moral authority and would have shown the Sudeten Germans to be unnecessarily antagonistic towards the Czechs.<sup>81</sup> At this major turning

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<sup>78</sup> Keith G. Robbins, “Konrad Henlein, the Sudeten Question, and British Foreign Policy,” *The Historical Journal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969) 692.

<sup>79</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 222.

<sup>80</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 195.

<sup>81</sup> Smelser, *The Sudeten Problem*, 235.

point in the proceedings, Henlein needed support from the Reich, and Hitler prepared to invade.

Hitler was ready, by 1938, to invade Czechoslovakia and fight a small war to gain control. His allies, however, who included Benito Mussolini in Italy, were less enthusiastic to enter a war.<sup>82</sup> The rest of Europe was even less interested in fighting another war only twenty years after the close of World War I. Out of fear that refusal to compromise would provoke an attack by Hitler's Germany on Czechoslovakia, Neville Chamberlain, the prime minister of Great Britain, was moved to act. He called a conference between himself, Hitler, Mussolini, and Édouard Daladier of France in Munich in September 1938. This conference was intended to prevent the outbreak of another war. Its actual consequences had a much longer reach and impacted people and territories far from the borders of the Sudetenland or Czechoslovakia.

### *The Munich Conference and the Second Republic*

The Munich Conference, in hindsight, was a massive mistake on the part of Great Britain and France. At the time, however, it was seen as the best possible approach to the increasingly volatile Sudetenland situation. Appeasing Hitler to prevent war was the goal, and both Chamberlain and Daladier believed they had accomplished that goal when they returned home in short-lived glory. In order to fulfill Hitler's perceived territorial desires, they sacrificed the Sudetenland to Nazi Germany and forced the Czech government to accept an agreement over which they had no control.

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<sup>82</sup> Gerhard L. Weinberg, "Munich after 50 Years," *Foreign Affairs* 67, no. 1 (Council on Foreign Relations, 1988) 167.

Perhaps this treatment of the Munich Conference seems too simplistic, but the fact remains that the government of Czechoslovakia played no role in the Munich Conference and was essentially informed that if they did not accept the agreement, they would be forced to fight the Nazis alone. Their former allies of France and Great Britain abandoned them in favor of potentially preventing World War II.<sup>83</sup> In 1938, the diplomats involved in achieving this agreement obviously did not have any knowledge of what would transpire over the next seven years, but their willingness to desert their Czechoslovakian allies in their time of need showed them to be fairly weak. That weakness certainly must have contributed to Hitler's increasingly aggressive foreign relations, since he did not think that the British or the French would act against him. In fact, Hitler apparently resented the fact that he had been forced into an agreement at Munich, when he would have much preferred to take the whole territory of Czechoslovakia at once.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, while the appeasement techniques of Chamberlain and Daladier were intended to dissuade Hitler from using force to take any more territory, the reality of the Munich Conference made him even more anxious to use his rebuilt military to invade other states to gain territory in Central and Eastern Europe. For the moment, though, Hitler had to be satisfied with the Sudetenland and the increasingly inevitable dissolution of Czechoslovakia as a state.

After Munich, Edvard Beneš resigned and fled the country before the Second Czechoslovak Republic was born. This government ruled by decree and excluded anyone perceived to be a threat to the nation, including Germans, Magyars, Poles, and especially Jews. It is estimated that the Second Republic sent between twenty and twenty-seven

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<sup>83</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 152.

<sup>84</sup> Weinberg, "Munich," 172.

thousand Jews into exile, despite the fact that many of them had fled from the Sudetenland in the first place to avoid the Nazi regime.<sup>85</sup> The Second Republic stood in stark contrast to what Czechoslovakia had tried, however unsuccessfully, to be in the interwar period. Whatever the faults of the First Republic, its government at least attempted to tolerate minorities and allow some expression of dissenting views, particularly from the Sudeten Germans. Because the new regime was so thoroughly undemocratic, it was likely viewed as fairly illegitimate in the eyes of the so-called Great Powers, who supported Edvard Beneš and his government-in-exile for much of the war. Additionally, the expulsion of tens of thousands of Jews mirrored the events taking place in Nazi Germany, which was becoming an increasingly obvious threat to the security of Europe.

For better or worse, the Second Republic did not last very long, as Hitler created the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in the rump state in March 1939. Slovakia was left a nominally independent state, but the puppet government there answered to the Nazis, making it little more than a satellite of the Reich. The Protectorate, on the other hand, was directly under the control of Hitler and his regime, and suffered the immediate consequences of that control. In the creation of the Protectorate, there was no military conflict, because Hitler had warned the government that the Czechs could avoid “massive destruction” by allowing the Nazi troops to pass into Prague without opposition.<sup>86</sup> Thus, by 1939, the entirety of the former Czechoslovakia was under the control of the Nazis, without a shot being fired. This bloodless transfer of territory and power to the Nazis was followed by a reign of terror and six years of bloodshed across Europe. At the time,

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<sup>85</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 25.

<sup>86</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 28.



however, few, if any Europeans had any conception of the chaos that Hitler would wreak upon the European landscape.

With the conclusion of the Munich Conference in 1938 and the subsequent creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia the following year, the Czechs were left to languish in Nazi-occupied territory for the remainder of World War II. Not only were no shots fired during the acquisition of this large territory, but none of Czechoslovakia's former allies even attempted to come to its defense. France and Great Britain feared that they could not yet equal Hitler's military prowess, and the Munich Conference remains one of the most severe missteps in interwar diplomacy.<sup>87</sup> The Czechs understandably felt abandoned by their allies and resented the relative ease with which Hitler took control over the lands they had once held. Their feelings of bitterness about the betrayal of Munich and the sense of regret and shame in Great Britain and France absolutely contributed to the postwar resolution of the Czech-German tensions that had sparked the Munich Conference in the first place. After their experiences before and during World War II, it is hard to blame the Czechs for being afraid of leaving the Germans where they were in the Sudetenland. Their demands to remove the Sudeten German population make sense in this context, even if the actual events of the expulsions remain questionable. The memory of Munich also contributed to the Allies' willingness to go along with the expulsion plans, as they likely felt responsible for what had happened to the Czechs before and during the war. The legacy of the Nazi occupation, which lasted from 1939 to 1945, looms large over postwar agreements and actions, and it is therefore the next period that must be addressed, in order to attain a better understanding of how the expulsions came about.

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<sup>87</sup> Weinberg, "Munich," 174.

## The Tyranny of the Minority: The Nazi Occupation and World War II

### *Life in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia*

The Czechs were understandably disheartened by the events at Munich and distraught over the prospect of living under Nazi rule. With their government destroyed in all but name, the Czechs living in the Protectorate were faced with oppression and violence at the hands of both the Reich Germans in power and the Germans already living in Czechoslovakia, who were given decidedly preferential treatment. Some Czechs were willing to resist the Nazi takeover, but “[t]he prospects for armed resistance and sabotage were bleak,” due to precautionary seizures of weapons and ammunition by the Nazis when they began their occupation of the region. The abandonment by Great Britain and France at Munich and the unchallenged establishment of the Protectorate had shown the Czechs that they could not rely on help coming from abroad, and the Nazis enforced their rule brutally, using the threat of arrest by the Gestapo to keep the Czechs from rising up.<sup>88</sup> The beginning of the war in 1939 in Poland raised their hopes, but those hopes were dimmed by the subsequent fall of Poland. The only positive aspect of the collapse of Polish resistance was that the Czechs were reassured that accepting the Munich Agreement had at least spared them and their lands the destruction that Poland now faced.<sup>89</sup> Thus, the Czechs sank into the occupation with few outward expressions of resistance.

The Germans, too, felt the negative side of Nazi occupation after the initial excitement over the annexation wore off. Germans in the Protectorate were at a distinct disadvantage in comparison to both the Reich Germans and their Czech neighbors. This

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<sup>88</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 39.

<sup>89</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 211.

was especially true for the men who had led the Germans in Czechoslovakia during the First Republic, as they were largely incorporated into Reich Nazi organizations and transferred outside the boundaries of the Protectorate.<sup>90</sup> Even Sudeten Germans were not immune to the discrepancies in the assignments given to Reich and Sudeten Germans. Relatively moderate former Sudeten German leaders like Henlein were replaced with more radical Nazis, like Karl Frank, or by Reich Germans, who took many of the top positions in the Protectorate after the occupation began. Another negative element of the occupation was that, while the Nazis were consolidating their power, it was also possible for Czechs in certain areas to discriminate against and harass Germans. The Czechs were able to come together in their hatred and resentment of their new rulers, while the Germans were still divided between “Reich” and “Sudeten” groups.<sup>91</sup> Of course, that harassment was not tolerated once the Reich had secured Czechoslovakia, but at the beginning of the war, some Czechs tried to resist by attacking Germans in their neighborhoods. The unification of the German people, which was the ostensible goal of the Nazi occupation in the first place, was not apparent at the beginning of the occupation. The true unification of the German people never really happened, since Sudeten Germans and Germans of the Protectorate were still identified as separate from Reich Germans, many of whom had the highest ranking positions in the administration.

For the Jews of Czechoslovakia, the Nazi occupation was worst of all. The Nuremberg Laws that had started the legal anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany were the model of anti-Jewish legislation in the Protectorate, and many Jews began to emigrate from the area, since it was clear that they would never be accepted into the regime, and it

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<sup>90</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 48.

<sup>91</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 47-48.

was becoming increasingly more dangerous for them to remain.<sup>92</sup> As Nazi power spread, it became even more difficult for Jews to continue living in the Protectorate, especially as the ideology of anti-Semitism, racialism, and genocide that drove the Nazi movement played an increasingly significant role in the administration of the country. Czech fascists played a role in persecuting Jews in the Protectorate, developing a new category of *Geltungsjuden*, who were “people of gentile and Jewish parents, when either the offspring was a member of the Jewish community after 1935, or married to a Jew, or when he or she were born out of wedlock after 1935.”<sup>93</sup> This new category created a whole group of people between ethnicities, many of whom were deported after drawing the negative attention of the authorities. Ordinary Czechs were also drawn into the process of deportation by becoming informants and denouncing their Jewish neighbors.<sup>94</sup> Many Jews had fled the Sudetenland to what became the Protectorate, but they were not safe there after occupation began.

After the invasion of Poland and the beginning of the war in September 1939, persecution of the Jewish population escalated, increasing the restrictions on their movements and behavior, as well as rounding up their leaders to eliminate any threat of resistance.<sup>95</sup> The Nazis took steps to eliminate any economic or political power the Jewish people still possessed. This process was known as “Aryanization,” and it entailed taking away any assets the Jewish population had and using them to enrich Germans.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 50-51.

<sup>93</sup> Maria von der Heydt, “‘Geltungsjuden’: Self-defined and Imposed Jewishness in Germany 1941 to 1945,” *Everyday Approaches to the Persecution of Jews of Greater Germany and the Protectorate, 1941-1945: Work in Progress*, (Berlin: H-German Digest, November 2010)

<sup>94</sup> Benjamin Frommer, “The Last Jews: Intermarried Families in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia,” *Everyday Approaches to the Persecution of Jews of Greater Germany and the Protectorate, 1941-1945: Work in Progress*, (Berlin: H-German Digest, November 2010)

<sup>95</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 58.

<sup>96</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 82.

The worst aspect of the occupation was, of course, the Holocaust, which did not miss Czechoslovakia. Prague, which had long been a haven for Jewish intellectuals and artists, was hit hard by the Nazi attempts to exterminate Jews from Europe. By the end of the war, 77,603 Protectorate Jews, out of the 88,686 counted in the summer of 1941 had been shipped off to concentration camps. An estimated 77,297 of those Jews were killed by the Nazis.<sup>97</sup> After the war was over, it was discovered that just over 400 Jews had survived the war by hiding in Prague.<sup>98</sup> The systematized and efficient Nazi methods of killing millions of people completely destroyed one of the most vibrant prewar Jewish communities in Europe.

When the Nazis took control of the Protectorate, though, it was not immediately clear what they were planning to do, particularly in terms of the Jewish population, but also in terms of their strategy for dealing with the Czechs. Many Czechs simply tried to wait out the storm of Nazi occupation, while some actively resisted and others willingly collaborated. Germans, too, had a variety of responses to the Nazi regime, but it became very clear early in the occupation that “the line between necessary accommodation and treasonous collaboration” was very thin indeed.<sup>99</sup> Throughout the war, that line continued to be very blurry, especially as the Nazis consolidated their power and eliminated any chance of rebellion among the Czechs. At the very beginning of the occupation, many Czechs showed their support for their formerly independent state by wearing national colors and participating in celebrations of Czech history. After an incident on November 15, 1939, however, during a commemorative ceremony to honor a Czech student who had been killed at the hands of German police, crowds became too rowdy and overturned

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<sup>97</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 147-148.

<sup>98</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 151.

<sup>99</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 210.

Karl Frank's car. This incident, while a remarkable instance of obvious Czech resistance, resulted in the death of nine students and the transport of over one thousand others to concentration camps.<sup>100</sup> After this demonstration of Czech national unity, the Czech intelligentsia was targeted and the Nazis hoped to wipe out any intellectual leaders who might unite the Czechs again.

This strategy seemed to work, at least for a time, especially after Reich Protector Reinhard Heydrich, who had near-total control over all legislative and political matters in the Protectorate, arrived in Prague in 1941.<sup>101</sup> The two years in between were marked with relative peace among the population of the Protectorate, as there was less violence against Czechs than there was against other populations, particularly in Poland and Yugoslavia. For a time, it did not even seem that the Czechs were extremely concerned about what was going on, since they knew "how to 'deal with' the Germans," from their long history with the Habsburgs and the Sudeten Germans.<sup>102</sup> That is not to say that the Czechs were happy with what was going on in their country, but they were not as outwardly resistant as Polish or Yugoslavian partisans, and therefore did not suffer as much violence as people in Poland and Yugoslavia. The unity they had felt when the Nazis first arrived diminished over time, leaving only national feelings that were largely passive and localized.<sup>103</sup> The Czechs were losing their national unity, largely due to the success of the Nazis in minimizing the expression of national feelings in public spaces through executions, deportations, and transports to concentration camps like those that followed the incident in 1939 discussed above. This success on the part of the Nazis

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<sup>100</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 60.

<sup>101</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 212.

<sup>102</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 63.

<sup>103</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 62.

made it easier for them to maintain control over the Czech population, but the end of the war revived the common hatred of the Germans and united the nation in that resentment.

The period between the beginning of the war and Heydrich's arrival in Prague also saw the beginning of the "Germanization" movement in the Protectorate. Because there were not enough Germans in the Reich to populate the vast territories annexed by the Nazis, it was determined that some members of Eastern populations would have to be turned into Germans. The Nazis intended to "weed out" non-suitable elements from the population and transform the others into members of the German nation. This concept of "Germanization" seems counterintuitive, given the Nazis' extreme feelings about Slavs and Jews, particularly in terms of mixing with Germans, but the Nazis were left with no choice. There was no way to replace all the Czechs with Germans, and the Nazis needed Czechs to continue contributing to the economy.<sup>104</sup> It was understood that those Czechs who were not considered suitable for "Germanization" would be either expelled or executed, to prevent their infiltration of the new, "pure" German state. The prospect of this program coming to fruition understandably upset many Czechs, who were proud of their heritage and history and were not enthusiastic about the idea of giving up their identities to benefit their oppressors.<sup>105</sup> The Nazis clearly did not have enough time to carry out all of their plans, but the idea of assimilation to a different culture was a common fear in Czechoslovakia, both before and during the Nazi occupation.

When Czechoslovakia was first established, the Sudeten Germans were particularly concerned with the prospect of "Czechification," which would rob them of their German heritage. The perception during the First Republic was that the dominance

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<sup>104</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 117.

<sup>105</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 189-190.

of Czechs in government, as well as the presence of Czechoslovak as the official national language, threatened the national identity of the Sudeten Germans. It was this “trend towards ‘Czechification’” that the Nazis and their Sudeten German supporters hoped to reverse during the occupation.<sup>106</sup> The idea was somewhat counterintuitive, since the alleged “Czechification” that was such a perceived threat during the First Republic did not eliminate the Germans’ identity as Germans. It is therefore strange that the Nazis believed that the imposition of their cultural and ideological theories would fundamentally change the way Czechs saw themselves. This fear of transformation to another nationality or ethnicity may have its roots in the former ease with which people were able to decide their own national identity by their actions. For the Nazis, and later the Czechs of the Third Republic, personal choice was eliminated from the equation. Identity was biological and genealogical, and the government assumed the right to assign national identity to individuals, no matter their personal preferences.<sup>107</sup> This assignation of identity was particularly significant in the Protectorate, because Czechs were seen as genetically closer to the ethnic Germans than other Eastern European peoples, including the Polish and Russian populations.

The Czechs were selected for “Germanization” because of this perceived genetic connection, although Hitler was concerned that even the Czechs could not be sufficiently “Germanized” to benefit the state. His primary concern was with the pollution of the German *Volk* with the “unclean and contaminated” blood of “Germanized” Czechs and Poles.<sup>108</sup> The contamination of “pure” German blood was a major issue for Hitler

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<sup>106</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 26.

<sup>107</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 5.

<sup>108</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 116. *Volk* literally means “people,” but under the Nazis, it came to indicate the unity of the German people under the Nazis. *Volksgemeinschaft*, or “people’s community,” also indicates



throughout his life, particularly in terms of Germans mixing with Jews, but he was not enthusiastic about the idea of weakening the German Volk by allowing Slavs to come in with Germans. On the other hand, some Nazis argued that the Czechs were particularly acceptable for this process because they were more “civilized” than most Slavic people, and they were seen to possess “that magic substance that made Germans special and superior.”<sup>109</sup> The intermingling of German and Czech cultures over the centuries had made them ideal candidates for “Germanization.” Individuals were not going to be given the choice to decide whether they wanted to be considered “German” or “Czech,” however. That power rested with the state, and the lines between “German” and “Czech” were drawn more starkly than could ever be realistic. This state control of even individual identity was part of the Nazis’ belief that every action should benefit the state and the *Volksgemeinschaft* in some way, even if the benefit was not immediately obvious to the person involved.

When Heydrich arrived in late September 1941, he intended to contribute to the continued dissolution of Czech national unity. He did so by imposing martial law through December, during which time around 400 perceived threats to Nazi rule were killed. To the Czech workers, however, Heydrich “delivered higher wages and better rations,” using workers’ benefits as a carrot to supplement the stick of violence he used on the intelligentsia and political activists.<sup>110</sup> His skillful use of both threats and tangible benefits for the working class helped him maintain his control over the region, but it concerned the government-in-exile, which was led by Edvard Beneš. The Czech exiles

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that unity, bringing together German populations in diaspora, such as the Sudeten Germans, and uniting them with the power of the Reich.

<sup>109</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 118.

<sup>110</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 212.

did not want the Allies to perceive the Czechs as willing collaborators, and they therefore had to take drastic action.

On May 2, 1942, two parachutists sent by the government-in-exile attacked Heydrich, who died of his wounds on June 4. This extreme act of resistance led to renewed repression and new levels of violence in the Protectorate. The village of Lidice was razed on June 10, with all the adult men killed, the women sent to concentration camps, and the children shipped off to foster homes.<sup>111</sup> The town was targeted, despite the fact that it had no real connection to Heydrich or his assassins. When the assassins were found, they were all either killed or committed suicide, and there were no further major acts of Czech resistance during the war.<sup>112</sup> The crackdown that followed Heydrich's assassination both prevented further resistance and provided additional ammunition for the government-in-exile to use in achieving its postwar goals. The massacre at Lidice was especially significant, because it provided Beneš and his comrades with a physical example of Nazi oppression and reinforced their argument that the Germans in Czechoslovakia should be held responsible for what happened during the occupation.<sup>113</sup> After Heydrich's death, Karl Frank was the undisputed head of the Protectorate, if not in name.<sup>114</sup> He was a Sudeten German and was also essentially responsible for the administration of the Protectorate. He was never given the official title of Reich Protector, but he was essentially in control of the Protectorate until the end of the war.

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<sup>111</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 212.

<sup>112</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 214.

<sup>113</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 171.

<sup>114</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 210.

By the time Heydrich was assassinated, transports had already sent tens of thousands of Protectorate Jews to concentration camps. Heydrich played a major role in radicalizing Protectorate policy towards the Jewish population, coordinating the first transports, which primarily went to Terezín, also known as Theresienstadt.<sup>115</sup> The first transports of Jews to concentration camps began in October 1941, about a month after Heydrich arrived. Terezín was “a fortress town in northwestern Bohemia” that was transformed into a concentration camp for Protectorate Jews, as well as some Jews from Germany and Austria. Transports to this particular camp began in January 1942, and Terezín became Hitler’s “showpiece.” Its position as a “model” camp meant that its inhabitants were relatively better off than those in other camps, but one of the “privileges” they were granted was the horrific duty of selecting candidates for the extermination camps. This “privilege” was likely intended to demoralize the Jewish population still further and make them feel responsible for the deaths of their fellow Jews. By the end of the war, as mentioned above, more than 75,000 Jews were killed by the Nazis; nearly 50,000 of those victims were sent to Terezín.<sup>116</sup>

While the human losses of the Holocaust in Czechoslovakia were nowhere near as horrific as those in Poland and Russia, where millions of Jews were slaughtered, the loss of over three-quarters of the Jewish population was a massive tragedy, which had major ramifications for the Czechoslovak Republic that emerged after the war. By June 1943, the last transport of Jews left Prague, leaving only around 400 Jews in the entire city.<sup>117</sup> Prague had once been a city where Germans, Czechs, and Jews could coexist, and the Jewish intellectuals in the lands of the former Habsburg Empire had always contributed

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<sup>115</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 147.

<sup>116</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 215.

<sup>117</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 151.

to the cultural life of the Empire and later the First Republic. After the war was over, however, the near-extirmination of the Jewish population left a huge hole in Czech culture and the Jewish presence in the region was never replaced.

The fear of the Gestapo and Nazi retaliation, particularly after 1942, prevented the Czechs from expressing their feelings about the Nazi regime outwardly. The practice of using terror's "optical effect" was a favorite tool of Frank's, who used publicity about executions and arrests to maintain his power. The sight of announcements declaring the detention and execution of Czechs, as well as the visual spectacle of arrests being carried out in broad daylight, certainly contributed to the atmosphere of fear surrounding resistance.<sup>118</sup> Resistance was not only a risk for the people choosing to act against the regime, but also for their friends, neighbors, and families. If the experience of Lidice taught the Czechs anything, it was that resistance of any kind could have unexpected and horrific consequences. Thus, any resistance that occurred was extremely secretive and small-scale. Most Czechs were unwilling to risk their lives and those of their loved ones for the sake of an abstract idea of the nation. Survival was more important than rebellion, and the Czechs repressed their feelings of dissent and anger towards the Nazis and Sudeten Germans until the end of the war.

Although the Czechs did not express their resentment of the Nazi regime outwardly in any major ways after Heydrich's assassination, hatred of the Nazis and, by extension, the Sudeten Germans, grew during the occupation. The Sudeten Germans were held responsible not only for bringing the Nazis into Czechoslovakia in the first place, but also for the atrocities committed by the Nazis after they arrived. The presence of men

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<sup>118</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 186.

like Karl Frank in high positions in the Nazi regime certainly did not help this perception, especially because he was such a radical Sudeten German, rather than a Reich German.<sup>119</sup>

The idea of expelling the pro-Nazi Sudeten Germans and eliminating the threat posed by their presence emerged early in the war and never went away. The Czechs were resentful of Nazi control of their lands and population, and were looking to express those resentments when the war finally ended.<sup>120</sup> Their equation of Nazi control with German control was not entirely unreasonable, because the vast majority of Protectorate positions were held by Germans, from either the Reich or the Sudetenland. On the other hand, compared, for example, to their Polish counterparts, the Czechs were not suffering all that much. There were certainly casualties of the Nazi regime, but the numbers of dead were considerably lower than those in surrounding states. Much of this discrepancy came from the fact that the Czechs had not resisted German occupation in 1938 or 1939, as the Polish people had done when the Germans invaded. The Czechs had therefore saved their people and lands from the devastation wreaked upon Poland and the Polish population during the invasion. The fact that the Protectorate was not a focus for bombing until 1944 also contributed to its relatively limited casualties, as well as its economic importance to the Reich. Its economic potential prevented too much oppression and violence, as the Nazis needed to exploit the resources and factories in the Protectorate to maintain their war effort.<sup>121</sup> In all, between 36,000 and 55,000 Czechs were executed or died in concentration camps during the war.<sup>122</sup> While those numbers are certainly representative of the suffering caused by the Nazi occupation, they are incredibly low compared to other

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<sup>119</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 214. Frank was partially responsible, for example, for the massacre at Lidice after Heydrich's assassination.

<sup>120</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 214.

<sup>121</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 214.

<sup>122</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 214-215.

occupied territories. The line between collaborator and victim continued to be blurry, and the Czech government-in-exile spent much of its time in London worrying about how to convince the world that the Czechs were, in fact, resisting, rather than simply allowing the Nazis to have complete control.<sup>123</sup> After the war, it was generally accepted that the Czechs had suffered under the Nazis more than they had helped them, and the Czechs were therefore not held responsible for the actions of the Nazi regime, but rather, were allowed to remove the threat posed by the Sudeten Germans and resume their democracy.

Before they could return to some semblance of normalcy, however, the Czechs had to last through the remainder of the war and await the return of their government-in-exile, which had been working for the duration of the war to ensure the territorial security of a new Czechoslovak Republic after the war, as well as the potential expulsion of the ethnic Germans in some form or another.

#### *Edvard Beneš and the Government-in-Exile*

While the people of Czechoslovakia were languishing under the control of the Nazis, the former government of the First Republic was in London for much of the war, trying to gain international support and act as a governing body from thousands of miles away. The first task of Beneš and the government-in-exile was getting recognition from the Allies as a legitimate government. The Czech government that still existed under the Nazis made this step slightly more difficult, since Beneš had not been elected, but he was still seen as the default leader of the Czechs in exile by both the Czechs and the Allies, primarily because of his position as President of the First Republic before Munich. Moreover, he successfully obtained recognition as a legitimate political leader by Great

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<sup>123</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 179.

Britain, France, the Soviet Union, and the United States by the end of the war.<sup>124</sup> After he had accomplished this feat, Beneš proceeded to work for the ostensible benefit of the Czechs at home, including the restoration of pre-Munich borders for Czechoslovakia. The repudiation of Munich also worked to give his regime legitimacy, since he was a link between pre-Munich Czechoslovakia and the future postwar Czechoslovakia.<sup>125</sup> His work in London also included calling the Czechs to rise up against their Nazi oppressors. The international perception of the legitimacy of the government-in-exile did not increase its influence in the Protectorate, though, because the Czechs felt that rising up would essentially be equivalent to “choosing a worthless death over embarrassing complacency.”<sup>126</sup> This disconnect between the government-in-exile and the Czechs at home would be a major stumbling block for the new regime, unless they could counter it with something to unify the people.

Beneš and his government found a unifying point in the repressed hatred of the Nazis and their Sudeten German allies. With public and international support behind him, Beneš began to advocate for the expulsion of at least the pro-Nazi Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia. He spoke to all the Allies, including the Soviet Union, trying to get their support for his plan. As mentioned above, the idea of expelling the Germans came about early in the war, but until Beneš had the support of the Allies, the idea remained a dream to keep the Czechs’ hopes alive during Nazi occupation. Beneš began using the terms “German” and “Nazi” interchangeably in his speeches and writing, likely hoping to make

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<sup>124</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 220. Beneš’s government was first recognized as a provisional government in July 1940, and was recognized as a “fully-fledged Allied government-in-exile” a year later.

<sup>125</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 220.

<sup>126</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 188.

the two terms synonymous in the minds of the British, Americans, and Soviets.<sup>127</sup> He was careful to note, however, that he did not think that all Germans were inherently bad. He made it very clear that there was a distinction between the “anti-European and anti-human” Germans and those who were decidedly “human.” On the other hand, he also accused the Germans of possessing an “incredibly strong inclination to pass from the one camp to the other as soon as political circumstances make the transition advantageous.” This statement seems hyperbolic, but it was just inflammatory enough to appeal to the people suffering under the Nazi regime. By mentioning this German “inclination” towards evil, he implied that militarism was inherent to “Germanness.” If that concept was accepted as true, it made sense to eliminate the threat by removing the population, since they were inherently aggressive and dangerous to other national groups.

Beneš also held the so-called “good” Germans responsible for their government, which was, in this case, the Nazis. He claimed that, even if a given government was autocratic and totalitarian, the people were still responsible for it if they “tolerate, suffer and obey their Government.”<sup>128</sup> As time progressed, the concept of “good” Germans was eclipsed by Beneš’s plan to remove the entire Sudeten German population by force. In order to make his plan work, Beneš used every tool available to him, from the betrayal at Munich to the massacre at Lidice.<sup>129</sup> By the end of the war, he had convinced not only the

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<sup>127</sup> Edvard Beneš and Milan Hauner, *The Fall and Rise of a Nation: Czechoslovakia 1938-1941* (New York: East European Monographs, 2004) 175-176. Throughout the entirety of this book, which is a collection of Beneš’s speeches and writings during this period, as well as commentary on his political career, Beneš constantly uses “German” and “Nazi” as synonyms. These pages were simply the most obvious instance where he drew a strong connection between all the Sudeten Germans and the Nazis.

<sup>128</sup> Beneš and Hauner, *The Fall and Rise of a Nation*, 176. This idea of holding people responsible for an autocratic regime like the Nazis is particularly interesting in light of the fact that the Czechs were tolerating, suffering, and obeying the Nazis during this period as well. Beneš did not extend this principle to the Czechs, as he wanted to portray them as mere victims of German aggression, not willing subjects like the Sudeten Germans.

<sup>129</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 213.



Czech people, but also the victorious Allies that the Germans simply could not stay in Czechoslovakia if it had any hope of succeeding as an independent state.

Whether Beneš always had a master plan to expel the Germans is as complicated a question as whether Henlein intended to cause the complete dissolution of Czechoslovakia. In both cases, it must be assumed that both men were more complex than their public personas and actions indicate. Accessing the psyche of a leader is nearly impossible, especially more than sixty years after the fact, but in both cases, the leaders in question acted in certain ways that indicate their attitudes. Those attitudes manifested themselves in the choices these men made, and those choices held massive ramifications for the people over whom these leaders wielded their power. Both the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans were permanently affected by the actions of these two men and, no matter their original intentions, their behavior led to outcomes that caused the suffering of millions of innocent civilians.

Before he could even consider expelling the German population, however, Beneš had to deal with the Czechs at home and supporting the war effort, in order to ensure that he and his state would have the support of the Allies in the postwar world. Since the Czech population was so loath to cross the vengeful Nazis, particularly Frank, it was always going to be difficult to convince them to rise up and fight, but Beneš knew that without some kind of gesture of solidarity and courage, the Czechs would have a much harder time finding support after the war for their plans to reconsolidate their state. There were Czech soldiers fighting on the Allied side of the war, but the lack of resistance at home made Beneš's claims of Czech suffering and dissent difficult to support.<sup>130</sup> Beneš

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<sup>130</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 219. "Two Czechoslovak regiments helped defend France, and some 4,000 soldiers were evacuated to England after the capitulation. Czechoslovak pilots also served in the French Air Force."

was desperate to maintain his position as a symbol of the nation, but he also wanted to use that symbolic value to promote Czech action, rather than simply inspire reverence. In order to go beyond his role as a symbol and consolidate his power as the undisputed leader of the Czech people, he had to convince the Czech people to fight the Nazis, without pushing so hard that the Czech public stopped supporting him. He had to balance his desire to maintain his popular support and his desire to show the Allies how serious the Czechs were about resisting Nazi rule.<sup>131</sup> Of course, it was easy for Beneš to call on the Czechs at home to resist, because he did not have to live under the iron fist of Heydrich or Frank, or deal with the realities that hindered those resistance groups that did exist. There were no weapons for them to use, and the people were frightened to join an organized group, for fear of being sent to a concentration camp if their participation was discovered.<sup>132</sup> This fear drove them to focus more on behaving morally and opposing the regime in private ways and on an individual level. The threat of arrest, torture, and execution was just too great for most Czechs to risk during the occupation, no matter what the government-in-exile wanted.

Finally, in May 1945, the Nazi regime crumbled as the war came to an end. The previous years had been marked with terror and violence, but the Czechs were finally ready to express their stored-up resentments when Nazi institutions began to look weak and stopped having the same ability to punish them. Furthermore, the “demonization of the Germans” by Beneš and his fellows had united the Czechs for the first time since early in the occupation, as they could all agree that they wanted the Germans expelled.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 216.

<sup>132</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 185.

<sup>133</sup> Some Czechs, of course, opposed the expulsions, particularly when they were excessively violent. It is unfair to imply that all Czechs supported the “wild transfers” and the brutalization of Germans that was so

By this point, all the Germans were marked for removal, including those who had lived in the Sudetenland for centuries. On May 1, an uprising began in Píseň and spread quickly through the Protectorate. It reached Prague by May 5. Some SS members kept fighting until May 9, when the Red Army arrived in the capital, but many Germans simply gave up and surrendered.<sup>134</sup> This Rising in Prague was the moment during which the Czech desires to expel the Germans began to be realized. The perception that there were “good” and “bad” Germans essentially disappeared, which meant that the vast majority of Germans were seen as Nazis who needed to be removed from the country. In that light, the Germans were treated as worse than criminals, being beaten, burned, raped, and tortured by their Czech neighbors. The extreme violence that came out of the Prague uprising set the stage for the population transfers to come. The almost immediate implementation of a new government seemed likely to stem the violence, but the brutality of the Rising in Prague was extended through the so-called “wild transfers” that lasted until the Potsdam Conference between the so-called Big Three of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union late in the summer. At Potsdam, the Allies made the expulsions legal, although they regulated how they would be carried out. By the end of 1946, Beneš had successfully removed nearly three million Sudeten Germans, primarily through internationally accepted means, and was firmly in control of the new state, at least for the time being.

The legacy of the Nazi occupation is one of violence, terror, and hostility, exemplified by the brutality of the Holocaust. That legacy manifested itself in the Rising

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widespread during 1945. On the other hand, the spontaneous nature of the Rising in Prague (discussed below) and the general lack of protest by Czechs during this time indicates that a large number of Czechs supported expulsion.

<sup>134</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 222.

in Prague and the “wild transfers” through the abuse and harassment of Germans in ways that mirrored Nazi attacks on Jews during their regime. Like much of Central and Eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia was afraid of another attempt by the Germans to take control. On the other hand, while the Czechs certainly lived in fear under the Nazis, their country was not devastated to the same extent as areas like Poland and Yugoslavia. As mentioned above, the primary reasons for the relative peace in Czechoslovakia were that the Protectorate was a major economic region for the Nazis and that the Czechs did not commit acts of resistance with the same frequency as populations in other countries. The Holocaust hit Czechoslovakia as hard as anywhere and wiped out one of the most vibrant capitals of Jewish life in Central Europe, leaving behind a society that was missing one of its key elements. One of the saddest parts of the history of the Holocaust in Czechoslovakia was the dispute over who could “claim” the Jewish victims of the Nazis as fellow victims with their national group.<sup>135</sup> Neither the Czechs nor the Germans fought to protect the Jews of Czechoslovakia from Nazi aggression, but both wanted to include the victims of the Holocaust to portray their nation as the worst victims of the Nazis. In the end, the legacy of the Nazis is fairly similar to that of the legacy of Nazi rule in most Central and Eastern European countries, and it had similar results in most areas: the expulsion of ethnic Germans after the war ended. The memory of the war and the events which led to the Nazi occupation shaped the Czech narrative of persecution and helped them justify their postwar treatment of the Sudeten German population, as well as assisting their efforts to gain approval from the Allies for their actions. The establishment of the Third Republic of Czechoslovakia worked to make the expulsions efficient and

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<sup>135</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 6.

internationally recognized as legitimate, while attempting to unite the Czechs in a truly national state for the first time.

### The End of the “Age of Minority Rights”<sup>136</sup>: The Third Czechoslovak Republic

Beneš returned to Czechoslovakia after the war as a national hero, bringing with him all the promise of a newly democratic state that would be exclusively Czechoslovak. The “wild transfers” of the Sudeten Germans began almost immediately, followed by the “organized transfers” which were sanctioned by the Potsdam Conference. Of course, the administration of the expulsions of the Sudeten Germans was not the only function of the Third Republic, but it is the one that is clearly most essential to this study. The lasting legacy of the Third Republic, which only existed until a Communist coup in 1948, is that of the expulsions and their aftermath.

The “wild” and “organized transfers” played a huge role in shaping the postwar national identities of the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans. Both periods will be discussed in much greater detail in the following chapter, but looking at the Czech perspective of these events will provide some much-needed context for the memories of the Sudeten Germans recorded and analyzed below. For Beneš and the Czechs he represented, the removal of the Sudeten Germans was the first priority of the new state. The “wild transfers” began fairly spontaneously, but, while the government made some remarks expressing regret for the violence that accompanied this first phase of the expulsions, little concrete action was taken to halt the brutality until the Potsdam Conference later in the summer.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 211.

<sup>137</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 274.

During the early “wild transfers,” Sudeten Germans were given little to no warning that they were to leave Czechoslovakia permanently, and the humiliation and abuse they suffered on their journey did not make leaving any easier. The Czechs felt that the “disloyal” Germans deserved to be not only expelled, but punished for what they had done, but there was no easy way to determine guilt or innocence.<sup>138</sup> The ambiguity surrounding guilt and innocence played a huge role in the perception of the expulsions as either righteous or unnecessarily harsh. The Czechs, who had come to see the Germans as collectively guilty for the crimes of the Nazis, saw their actions against the perceived enemy as completely justified. The Sudeten Germans were blindsided by the sudden wave of violence, primarily because there had been such little resistance during the Nazi occupation, and felt that they were victimized unfairly by the Czechs for the actions of Nazi leaders. Germans across Europe, and particularly in Germany itself, felt the same way, as they did not think it was just to punish an entire people for the behavior of a few powerful men. Again, this will all be discussed in much more detail below, but examining the situation on the ground is crucial to understanding the way the expulsions evolved from spontaneous violence to organized and efficient population movements.

President Beneš ruled by decree until a Provisional National Assembly convened in October 1945. During the time between German capitulation and the first meeting of the National Assembly, Beneš issued decrees that dealt with the Sudeten Germans and their subsequent expulsion from the state. In June, he issued the so-called “Great Retribution Decree,” which “placed the Germans and Hungarians beyond the law, and stripped them of their citizenship and of civil or even basic human rights.”<sup>139</sup> Hungarians

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<sup>138</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 273-274.

<sup>139</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 224.

were seen as willing collaborators with the Germans, and they were therefore punished just as harshly as the Germans during this period. The escalation of the rhetoric against the Sudeten Germans in official decrees made it easy for Beneš and the Czechoslovak government to justify the expulsions, by demonizing the Germans and associating them unequivocally with the hated Nazis.<sup>140</sup> Even after Beneš's rule by decree had ended, the National Assembly accepted his decrees and made them into law, as well as granting amnesty to anyone who had committed crimes between September 1939 and October 1945, as long as those crimes had been committed for the sake of the state.<sup>141</sup> Those crimes included any violence towards Sudeten Germans after the end of the war, which meant that the National Assembly was essentially sanctioning the excessive brutality of the immediate postwar period and excused Czech participation in it as an effort on behalf of the state. American and Soviet forces withdrew from Czechoslovakia around this time, leaving a government that not only condoned violence against some of its former citizens, but also removed them from the protection of the law, in charge of the new state.

By the end of 1946, nearly three million Germans had been removed from the Sudetenland and other areas of Czechoslovakia. Many of these Germans were expelled

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<sup>140</sup> Theodor Schieder, ed., "The Kaschau Programme: Programme of the new Czechoslovak Government of the National Front of Czechs and Slovaks accepted at the first cabinet council held on April 5, 1945," 183-189; "Decree of the President of the Republic of May 19, 1945, concerning the invalidity of certain legal transactions affecting property during the time when liberty was lost, and concerning the national administration of property assets of Germans, Magyars, traitors and collaborators and of certain organizations and institutions," 193-194; "Decree of the President of the Republic of June 1945, concerning the punishment of Nazi criminals, traitors and their accomplices, and the Extraordinary People's Courts," 200-207; "Proclamation of the District Administrative Commission of Tetschen-Bodenboch of October 15, 1945," 301-305, all in *Documents on the Expulsion of the Germans from East-Central Europe*, Vol IV, trans. G.H. de Sausmarez (Bonn: Federal Ministry for Expellees, Refugees and War Victims, 1960). As these documents progress along the timeline of the end of World War II and the beginning of the expulsions, it is possible to see the increasingly polemic language used by the government in dealing with the Germans in question. Although Germans are continually implicated as Nazi supporters, there is an increasing tendency over time to simply call the expellees Germans, making identification as such a crime in itself.

<sup>141</sup> Agnew, *The Czechs*, 225.

under the Potsdam Declaration. The leaders of the Big Three agreed to the orderly expulsion of nearly all ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe after the war, because they were well aware of the brutality involved in the spontaneous expulsions and did not want to be overrun with refugees, especially since many of the expellees during the “wild transfers” were completely destitute.<sup>142</sup> Over twelve million Germans were eventually affected by these mass expulsions from Eastern Europe, which means that nearly a quarter of the ethnic Germans expelled came from Czechoslovakia.<sup>143</sup> Of those three million, nearly two thirds were expelled under the regulations of the Potsdam Declaration. The Potsdam Declaration was crucial in stopping the violence that had marked the summer of 1945, because the Allies had much closer control over conditions. The transports were very structured, with only a certain number of people being allowed into Germany each week. The expellees were allowed to bring more belongings with them, as well as money, and their transportation was to be a higher quality than it had been during the “wild transfers.”<sup>144</sup> These improvements made the “organized transfers” slightly easier for the Sudeten Germans, and the Czechs seemed satisfied with just removing the Germans without the same violence that had marked the transports of 1945. The end result of removing the Sudeten Germans from Czechoslovakia overshadowed all other considerations, and the expulsions themselves were considered to be enough of a punishment for the collective crimes of the Sudeten Germans.

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<sup>142</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 241.

<sup>143</sup> Eagle Glassheim, “National Mythologies and Ethnic Cleansing: The Expulsion of Czechoslovak Germans in 1945,” *Central European History* 33, no. 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 465.

<sup>144</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 284-285. These regulations were largely followed, but violations still occurred. The higher quality of transportation during this period was essentially due to the use of heated trains, instead of cattle cars or forced marches, both of which were common during the “wild transfers.”



The Third Republic fell in 1948 to a Communist coup, but not before the vast majority of the Sudeten German population had been removed. Although Edvard Beneš was certainly open to cooperation with the Soviet Union when he returned to the presidency, he was not explicitly a Communist. Thus, the expulsions took place under an ostensibly democratic government, and not an autocratic Soviet regime, as some Sudeten Germans, and probably some Czechs, would like to believe. At least 30,000 expellees lost their lives, primarily during the “wild transfers,” and millions of people were displaced.<sup>145</sup> The Czechs remember this moment as the act of retribution the Germans deserved for their actions under the Nazis, while the Germans recall it as a traumatic and horrific event that came as a complete surprise. The collective guilt placed on the Sudeten Germans by the Czechs may have led to the collective memory of the events of 1945 and 1946, as the individual accounts of the expulsions combined to create a group narrative that defines the Sudeten Germans to this day. Their memories, many of which were recorded in later years, will be analyzed in the following chapter.

This historical background of Czech-German relations throughout the centuries, and particularly the impact of the recent past on Czech and German attitudes, should provide a context for the intense feelings of the people affected by the expulsions. The long history of Czech-German coexistence cannot be discounted, but the lens of the present should not be used to project more recent tensions and hostilities onto a distant past that does not reflect similar themes. There have been moments of tension between these groups throughout their history together, but those moments do not necessarily point to an inevitable clash, like the one that happened in 1945 and 1946. Instead, the events of the past should be used to enhance the more recent history of interaction by

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<sup>145</sup> Glassheim, “National Mythologies and Ethnic Cleansing,” 463.

showing the common elements and different reactions that mark the relationship between Czechs and Germans. The collective memories and accepted histories of past events reflect on the interpretations of the expulsions by both sides by informing both Czech and German attitudes towards one another. Understanding the historical context for the expulsions is crucial to seeing the development of collective memories surrounding the events of 1945 and 1946. The following chapter examines individual memories in the context of this historical background, and should illuminate further the reasons why Czech-German interaction escalated the way it did, as well as the impact the past, both distant and recent, had on the German and Czech experience of their present.

## II. Memory, Identity, and History: The Forced Expulsions,

1945-1946

In order to understand the impact of the expulsions on Central Europe and Czechoslovakia, it is essential to remember what happened, but since there are few scholars who study the topic and publish about it in English, it can be difficult for English speakers to comprehend the effects of the population transfers of 1945 and 1946. Fortunately, some of the expellees were able to record their memories and their stories provide a unique insight into the events surrounding the expulsions. Many of these accounts have been collected into several volumes of documents by editors, and some of them have been selected to be translated into English. These accounts are some of the remaining primary documents about the “wild” and “organized” transfers, making them essential to an understanding of the expulsions. Many of these authors felt, unsurprisingly, that they, as Germans and former Czechoslovakian citizens, were unfairly punished for crimes most of them did not commit. Unfortunately, individual Czech accounts of this period are more difficult to find, so it can be challenging to balance the perspectives and see both sides of the event, although the Czechs used the Nazi oppression described in the previous chapter as justification for the expulsions. From either perspective, memory, either of the Nazi regime or the expulsions themselves, plays a large role in the way collective history is formed and altered, and memory lays the foundation for the construction of a group identity in a profound way. Furthermore, memory is often one of the only ways to capture traumatic events like the expulsions and is an invaluable resource to any historian who wishes to analyze the post-war period at a deeper level than simple statistics and facts.

In this chapter, the memories of German expellees will provide starting points for an analysis of the confusion and trauma of the “wild transfers,” as well as the slightly better administered, but still emotionally painful “organized transfers.” In the first part of this chapter, which deals with the “wild transfers,” I will be using one account as a paradigmatic example, in order to use the patterns that emerge to illuminate the ways memory can establish and embellish history. Following that pattern-setting account, additional memories of other aspects of the expulsions will complete the picture of the experiences of the expellees. In the second half of the chapter, which addresses the “organized transfers,” I will use portions of a variety of accounts throughout the entire section, in order to show the commonalities between many of the experiences of the expellees.

Because the expulsion accounts are written from the German point of view, the Czech perspective will be posed as a counterargument to certain of the allegations made by the German transferees. Using these German accounts illuminates the inherently subjective nature not only of memory, but also of history in general. The “facts” assumed to make up historical accounts of events or periods are often based on the memories of people who lived through them. Therefore, whether German or Czech memories or an “objective” historian’s account of the expulsions are used, there will always be subjectivity present. Acknowledging that inherent subjectivity from the beginning is crucial to seeing the way both history and national identity are shaped by the distinct collective memories of different groups of people. Full weight will be given to the events described and the emotions of those involved, and it should be understood that, however subjective these accounts are, they represent the remembered experiences of real people.

The transfers of millions of people from Czechoslovakia irreversibly impacted their worldview and forced a shift in their collective identity and understanding of history. This shift, which can still be observed in this group of Germans today, is the most significant part of this entire study. Therefore, the analysis of each period will be structured around the accounts of individual expellees and will trace the progression of the mentality of the expelled Germans throughout the process of expulsion. Examining these accounts closely allows the reader to observe the creation of a unified narrative and understand the ways in which memory and history are inextricably linked.

#### Expulsion from the *Heimat*: Popular Violence and the “Wild Transfers” of 1945

The “wild transfers” of 1945 were the first series of semi-organized expulsions of Germans from Czechoslovakia, many of which were carried out with significant violence and hostility towards the newly-captive German populations. At this point in the expulsion process, according to the decrees of the President of the Czechoslovak Republic, anti-fascists and Communists were supposed to be protected from the forced migration, but they were often targeted along with the rest of the German population, despite the fact that they “proved their faithfulness even in times of great difficulty” and were persecuted by the Nazis alongside the Czechs.<sup>146</sup> Their sacrifices during the war were often overlooked in favor of eliminating the Sudeten German population in its entirety. The Czech government and people had learned a powerful lesson from the Nazis: “raw power and violence won out over fundamentally democratic values of negotiation and compromise.”<sup>147</sup> Rather than waiting for the international community to

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<sup>146</sup> Schieder, “The Kaschau Programme,” *Documents on the Expulsion*, 183.

<sup>147</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 259.

approve these massive population transfers, the Czech government and nation acted unilaterally to expel the Germans and remove the perceived threat the Germans posed to the newly liberated state. This desire was informed by memories of centuries of coexistence and shared history with the Sudeten Germans, first under the Habsburg Empire and, more recently, under the Nazi regime of terror. While feelings of hostility towards the Germans seemed completely justified to the Czechs, the targets of that anger (namely, the Germans) were completely shocked by the apparently instantaneous change in attitude they saw in the Czechs around them.

Examining firsthand accounts of the “wild transfers” illuminates the fear and uncertainty felt by all Germans expelled in these large and violent expulsions, as well as shedding some light on their conditions during the expulsions. In April, 1953, one German recorded his memories in the following account:

It was striking 11 p.m. and my wife and I were just going to bed when we heard our name being called from the yard. I went to the open window and saw a Czech with some papers in his hand. I went downstairs and he handed me one of them. We read the heading and felt as if we had been stabbed by a knife, the shock made us quite speechless. It said that at 2 a.m. on the following day (i.e. in three hours' time) we had to be at the railway station in order to be expelled. Consider our situation: we had never heard anything about an expulsion, we had not the slightest feeling of guilt, in the opposite, we had hated the Nazi regime from the very beginning – and now, suddenly and completely without warning, we were to leave our home and all our beautiful and valuable property which we had acquired during decades, and were to go into a wholly uncertain future. It was a terrible position. Only 24 kilograms of luggage per person were allowed to be taken. We were quite unable to do anything; the clock struck 12 and 1 and 2 and 3, and we could not regain our composure. Suddenly, shortly after 3 a.m., we again heard our name being called from the yard. I went downstairs again and was handed another printed form which told us that our expulsion at 2 a.m. on 17 June 1945 had been rescinded. A heavy load was taken off our mind, we breathed freely again and our hopes began to rise.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Schieder, No. 78, “Report of the experiences of E. Wollmann, government inspector, of Friedland (Iser Mountains).” *Documents on the Expulsion*, 462-463.

E. Wollmann, the author of this account of the “wild transfers,” represents millions of other Germans whose homes and livelihoods were ripped from them in the aftermath of the downfall of the Nazi regime. While the imagery of being “stabbed by a knife” with shock is unique to his account, the rapid and unexpected removal of Germans from their homes to other areas was all too common. In fact, in the Saaz district, which lay slightly farther west than Friedland, one family was apparently given only ten minutes during which to gather their belongings and prepare for expulsion.<sup>149</sup> Wollmann’s description of the suddenness of the order captures the fear and uncertainty that plagued the majority of the expellees throughout their journey. They were given no advance warning and very little time to grasp the situation and respond to it.

It is unclear whether the lack of advance warning was an intentional element of the transfers on the part of the Czechs, or simply a failure in communication that could not be helped in the more rural areas of the country. It is also plausible that the trauma of the experience led people to exaggerate the speed and surprise of the evacuation orders. Because of the specificity of the timeframe described by Wollmann, however, it seems more likely that he is telling the truth about the suddenness of his departure. In Radomír Luža’s book about this period, he indicates that the practice of notifying expellees of their impending departure only a few hours before the trains left was a common practice, and that Czechs may have had some knowledge of what exactly was going on.<sup>150</sup> Whether or not knowledge of these events indicates complicity is a complicated matter, however, and it would be a mistake to assume that all Czechs knew the conditions of the transfers or

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<sup>149</sup> Theodor Schieder, ed., Nr. 91, “Erlebnisbericht der Lehrerin O.F. aus dem Kreis Saaz,” *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa*, Band IV/2, trans. Erin Wilson, (Berlin: Bundesministerium für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge und Kriegsgeschädigte, 1957) 415-416.

<sup>150</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 272.

supported the actions of their government and neighbors. Assuming collective guilt on either side of this conflict oversimplifies an incredibly complex situation, and it is misleading to paint any ethnic conflict in such black and white terms.

Whether or not the Czechs intended to use the hurried nature of the expulsion as a method to dominate the expellees, Wollmann and his wife were so shocked and scared that they could no longer function properly even to gather their belongings. The sudden change of fates contributed to their shock, because of the way their “hopes began to rise” when they found out that they were not, in fact, going to be forcibly removed from their homes. This reaction is certainly understandable under the circumstances. On the other hand, it seems a bit naïve of Wollmann and other Germans like him to have allowed themselves to “breathe[ ] freely,” since their expulsion was rescinded so abruptly and the decision was made apparently arbitrarily and with no warning, just as the initial decision had been. In their relief at the positive consequences of this new development, Wollmann and his wife allowed themselves to (falsely) hope that the whole situation had been resolved in their favor. Rather than simply taking the news at face value, the Germans could have partially mediated the emotional trauma of the transfers by preparing themselves mentally for the worst case scenario of expulsion. Instead of being prepared for retribution, numerous accounts of the Rising in Prague and the “wild transfers” express profound disbelief on the part of the expellees at the hostility exhibited by Czechs towards their German neighbors, as well as hope that it was not really happening, as that was too painful a possibility for the Germans in question to bear.

Their genuine disbelief translated into a combination of practical and emotional reactions for many of the impacted Germans. For instance, Wollmann mentions the



restrictions placed on luggage, which is common to many accounts of this period, although the specific limits varied.<sup>151</sup> During the so-called “organized transfers,” the Allied powers mandated a higher limit for luggage than the Czechs had originally allocated for each person affected by the “wild transfers,” and that change is reflected in accounts of the two periods. The limits also varied across the country, since the “wild transfers” were not officially regulated, although thirty kilograms of luggage seems to have been the norm. These harsh restrictions on luggage limits were only one aspect of the expulsions, which also provided an arena for Czechs to release their anger towards the Germans through physical and verbal abuse. The government, however, “took little direct action to halt the violence,” and left Czech soldiers and citizens to take out their anger on the alleged perpetrators of Nazi atrocities.<sup>152</sup> President Beneš made a speech about the inhumane treatment of the Germans in June 1945, but speeches alone were not enough to stop the violence.<sup>153</sup> The Czech government clearly understood that the will of the people involved the expulsion of the Germans, and therefore, any actions that were taken to prevent that result were half-hearted at best.

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<sup>151</sup> Schieder, No. 80, “Report by E.K., housewife, of Langebruck in the district of Reichenberg,” 463-464; No. 82. Report of the experiences of Wilhelm Mann, engineer, of Deutsch Gabel, 464-467, both in *Documents on the Expulsion*; and Schieder, Nr. 73, “Erlebnisbericht des Gastwirts A.B. aus Römerstadt,” *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 375-377. These sources mention the thirty kilogram limit on luggage weight, as well as showing the variation in other regulations. E.K. mentions that cash and jewelry were not permitted, but Mann says that in addition to luggage, “food for five days, as well as all available German money” were allowed. A.B. reports being allowed sixty kilograms at the start of the journey, which was progressively scaled back to the thirty kilograms common in other areas. The lack of regulation by the government led to these differing regulations; Schieder, No. 104, “Report of the experiences of Margarete Zimmermann née Hawelka, kindergarten teacher, of Friedrichsdorf near Iglau,” *Documents on the Expulsion*, 501-503. While this account records the “organized” period of the transfers (which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section), it is an example of the early period of the “organized transfers” and the ways in which the regulations set down in the Potsdam Declaration were not initially enforced, as the author describes the thirty kilograms of luggage she and her mother shared, as opposed to the fifty kilograms mandated by the Potsdam Agreement.

<sup>152</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 239.

<sup>153</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 274.

The “wild transfers” continued until the Potsdam Conference, which took place in the summer of 1945, and which is discussed in the previous chapter. At this conference, Harry S. Truman, Josef Stalin, and Winston Churchill (and later Clement Attlee), also known as the Big Three, debated solutions to the problems and crises in regions formerly occupied by the Nazis, including Czechoslovakia. The powers occupying Germany at the time were aware of the “wild transfers,” and were anxious to stop them, partly out of concern for the human rights violations (and the subsequent public reaction to those violations) and partly because of the demands being placed on their resources by the tens of thousands of refugees crossing the border every day.<sup>154</sup> Their political and, to some degree, humanitarian, concerns led to the “organized transfers,” which were primarily supervised by the governments of Czechoslovakia, the United States, and the Soviet Union, and which had regulations that limited the number of expellees and monitored the conditions in which they lived during the transfers. The luggage limits during these transfers were more lenient, allowing fifty kilograms of luggage per person, to ensure that “the emigrants should have at least the most necessary articles for their life in Germany.”<sup>155</sup>

The Allies were concerned with making conditions more humane during the transfers, but one also wonders if their desire for the refugees to bring more belongings with them also stemmed from their own interests. The Americans and Soviets could not have been thrilled at the prospect of supplying millions of people with the goods and food they would need to survive in their new homes. Regardless of their intentions, however,

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<sup>154</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 240.

<sup>155</sup> Schieder, “Minutes of the talks held between representatives of the United States Military Government in Germany and representatives of the ČSR on 8 and 9 January 1946, concerning ways and means of carrying out the expulsion of Sudeten Germans and their reception in the American Zone of Occupation in Germany.” *Documents on the Expulsion*, 312.

the increased luggage allotments and the regulations on treatment of the expellees certainly improved the conditions of those who were subjected to the transfers. The “organized transfers,” with their more rigorously defined (and more uniformly enforced) restrictions, were less traumatic for those involved, at least in comparison to the “wild transfer” experiences of Wollmann and others like him, but still provoked strong feelings in the Germans and Czechs involved. For the Czechs, the regulation of the transfers by the Big Three likely stung a bit, because the Czechs felt that the Great Powers had betrayed them with the prewar Munich Agreement, which had allowed the occupation to happen in the first place.<sup>156</sup> In the context of the sacrifice of Czechoslovakia in the name of appeasing Hitler, as well as the subsequent six years of Nazi occupation, it seems likely and somewhat understandable that the Czechs felt entitled to act as they saw fit once the war ended. On the other hand, removing the Germans became the primary Czech goal after the war, and since the regulations mandated by the Allies allowed the transfers to continue, the Czechs acquiesced and largely adhered to the Potsdam Agreement in 1946. The “organized transfers” and their consequences will be discussed in much greater detail in the following section.

Returning to the account of a “wild transfer” recorded above, it is interesting to note that Wollmann also emphasizes the feeling of loss when he and his wife were forced to abandon their “beautiful and valuable property” that had taken them many years to cultivate and maintain. A number of Germans who recalled their experiences echo this sadness and nostalgia for the home country, especially in contrast with the “uncertain future” that loomed so frighteningly before the expellees. Many expellees faced continual movement and instability after crossing the border, and counted themselves lucky if they

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<sup>156</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 152.

were granted permission to stay in one location for a few months.<sup>157</sup> The refugees may not have known the specifics about their future conditions, but in spite of (or perhaps because of) the lack of concrete details about where they were going and what it would be like, it was clear that they were reluctant to leave their homes and personal belongings. For example, F.P. and his family, farmers in the small town of Heinrichschlag, had owned their home for centuries and were understandably loath to abandon it.<sup>158</sup> This abandonment of their homes often seemed to be the first truly traumatic aspect of the experience for many expellees, which was only compounded by further abuses at the hands of the Czechs and the level of destitution in which they lived during the transition into Germany. Even for those without a long family history in a given town or region, the loss of their homes was an extremely upsetting experience, since the Sudeten Germans were immensely attached to their homeland and were distressed to consider leaving it.

The nostalgia of many Germans for their homeland after the expulsions is exemplified by the commonly-used term *Heimat*, which literally means “homeland,” or “native country.” The word is better understood, though, as a concept which embraces the local variation between hometowns and villages, particularly in rural areas, connecting them to a German identity, by showing the “local place and the region as the cradle of German nationhood.”<sup>159</sup> The concept of *Heimat* was appropriated by the Nazis into their ideology of the pan-German nation, which included all areas with a German population, no matter how small. They emphasized the “race, blood, and soil” aspects of the term,

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<sup>157</sup> Schieder, No. 87, “Report of the experiences of E.H., civil engineer, of Teplitz-Schönau,” *Documents on the Expulsion*, 467-469.

<sup>158</sup> Schieder, Nr. 94, “Erlebnisbericht des Bauern F.P aus Heinrichschlag, Kreis Neubistritz,” *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 432-433.

<sup>159</sup> Alon Confino, “Edgar Reitz’s *Heimat* and German Nationhood: Film, Memory, and Understandings of the Past,” *German History* 16, no. 2 (The German History Society, 1998) 191.

using Heimat as a justification for their expansion into areas with relatively small German minorities, as well as a way to bring distant localities under the umbrella of the German nation. This change in emphasis led to the addition of racial and cultural unity (and homogeneity) to the conception of Heimat and German nationhood. Additionally, once the Nazi regime fell, the idea of Heimat changed again, to refer to the “authentic German ways of life” that best epitomized the German feeling of national pride, “without associating it with nationalism” in the Nazi sense of the word.<sup>160</sup> The abstract term, while it may not have been a major topic of concern to the Germans like Wollmann whose lives were being so irreversibly disrupted by the expulsions, encompassed not only the current and future state of the German nation, but also its heroic past.

The memories included in the accounts of both the “wild” and “organized” transfers were undoubtedly influenced by the idea that experience “belongs to the people and their ability to remember it,” which was central to Heimat ideology.<sup>161</sup> The history of the people came to be understood as a profoundly personal concept, involving the experience of events and an emotional attachment to a certain locality or region. Because many of the expelled Germans were from farming communities, their attachment to their land was profoundly important to their understanding of the events of 1945 and 1946. The emphasis on the locality of the community was essential to their understanding of their identity as Germans, certainly, but also to their understanding of their connection to history and the world at large. Additionally, the Czechs told the expellees that Germany was to become their “new homeland,” even though, for the Germans involved, the very

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<sup>160</sup> Confino, “*Heimat*,” 192.

<sup>161</sup> Confino, “*Heimat*,” 194.

idea of a “new homeland” was an oxymoron.<sup>162</sup> Because they identified so intimately and so specifically with the concept of their communities and homes, Germans in the post-war period were able to disassociate themselves from the uglier parts of their recent history, including the Nazi regime.<sup>163</sup> This disassociation gave them the ability to deny any involvement in the horrific atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis, both in Germany and in Czechoslovakia.

Several Germans who recorded their memories, including Wollmann, whose own account was written nearly ten years after the events took place, emphasized their own sympathy with the Czechs and their antipathy towards Nazi rule.<sup>164</sup> This focus on personal innocence, which played a large role in post-war West German culture, may well have been informed by Heimat ideology, as well as a real lack of understanding of the consequences of Nazi actions for Czechs during the occupation. While the oppression in Czechoslovakia was, relative to other occupied areas like Poland, not extremely severe, repression of Czech identity and language to elevate “Germanness” to a higher level of culture definitely created and exacerbated tensions between the German and Czech populations. The Nazi plan to “Germanize” Czechoslovakia involved the “national mutation” of “suitable” Czechs and the murder or exile of the rest of the population, and this plan was one of the main perceived threats to Czech culture that drove the expulsion of the Germans after the war.<sup>165</sup> Of course, the Nazis did not achieve their goals of

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<sup>162</sup> Schieder, Nr. 73, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 375-377.

<sup>163</sup> Confino, “*Heimat*,” 197.

<sup>164</sup> Schieder, No. 90, “Report of the experiences of Adalbert Ehm, skilled worker, of Komotau,” *Documents on the Expulsion*, 469-472; Schieder, Nr. 91, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 415-416. Both accounts emphasize the antipathy of the authors and their families towards the Nazi regime, as well as their loyalty to Czechoslovakia before, during, and after the occupation.

<sup>165</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 189. Luža expresses the Czech fear that the Nazis were planning to completely destroy the Czech nation through “assimilation, deportation, colonization, and extermination.” It could be possible to argue that the Czech program of expulsion mirrors this Nazi policy,

“Germanization,” because they were defeated before they could carry out all of their plans, but the “brutal and unjustified severity” of the Nazi regime towards the populations of their occupied territories was more than enough to provoke anti-German feelings among the Czech people.<sup>166</sup> During the occupation, it was both difficult and dangerous for Czechs to express their resentment of German dominance, but as soon as Nazi institutions began to crumble, that resentment became abundantly clear. Wollmann’s assertion that he and his wife “had hated the Nazi regime from the very beginning” may well have been accurate, but part of the difficulty in identifying and punishing the guilty parties lay in the fact that it was often nearly impossible to tell the difference between a Nazi supporter and an anti-fascist.

Further complicating the situation was the fact that, in various government decrees written about the consequences for former Nazis and their supporters, the people in question were described alternately as “Germans” and “Nazis.”<sup>167</sup> Adalbert Ehm, a skilled worker from Komotau, makes the distinction between those who joined the National Socialist Party before the occupation in 1938 from the Nazis who had held power for the past six years, emphasizing the loyalty to the Czechoslovak Republic that those early Party members allegedly had.<sup>168</sup> This difference was lost on the Czechs, who

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but, while the expulsions were undoubtedly violent, the extermination of the Sudeten Germans and the destruction of their culture were not the motivations behind the transfers. Rather, the Czechs simply wanted to remove the Germans from their country to prevent them from threatening Czech national culture again.

<sup>166</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 207.

<sup>167</sup> Schieder, “Kaschau Programme,” 183-189; “Decree of the President of the Republic of June 1945, concerning the punishment of Nazi criminals, traitors and their accomplices and the Extraordinary People’s Courts,” 200-207; “Expulsion Notices from the year 1945,” 308-311, all in *Documents on the Expulsion*. In the Kaschau Programme, anti-Nazis and anti-Fascists were called “Germans,” but so too were former Nazis, blurring the line between the innocent and the guilty. In the Presidential decree, Nazis are specifically targeted, but by the time the expulsions began, the expellees were back to being called simply “Germans” once more.

<sup>168</sup> Schieder, No. 90, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 469-472. This idea of the difference between early German National Socialists and the more extreme Nazis that came to the forefront after the occupation

were suspicious of anyone who had ever expressed loyalty to the National Socialist Party in any of its incarnations. Since most Germans had been at least apathetic, if not outwardly supportive, toward the Nazi regime, it was extremely difficult to separate the anti-fascists from the Nazi supporters, so the Czechs eventually gave up, preferring to expel any possible threat, without distinction. Amphibians like those discussed in the previous chapter only added to the confusion about who could be considered a “German” or a “Czech,” because of their fluid sense of their own national and ethnic identity.<sup>169</sup> To the Czech government, the Wollmanns, whether they actually disliked Nazi rule or not, represented a threat to national security, and had to be evacuated to eliminate the problem.

Before the evacuation, however, the Wollmanns and their fellow Germans had to be notified of the second reversal in their fates, this time making the expulsion a reality. As mentioned in the above quote, Wollmann and his wife were apparently saved from expulsion at the last moment, which made them understandably hopeful that they would be allowed to stay in their home. Wollmann goes on to explain the confusion and emotions surrounding the second order of expulsion.

This hope, however, was only to last for a few hours. It turned out that the first communication had stated that we were to be expelled in agreement with the Russian occupation authorities, and the Russians had objected to this. At their command the expulsion order had to be revoked. But, as I said, our hope was short-lived. On the same day, at 3 p.m., we were told to be at 6 p.m. at the station for irrevocable expulsion. A protest to the Russian occupation authorities was unsuccessful. This expulsion was the

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began calls back to the radicalization of the SdP. Konrad Henlein and other relative moderates lost control in favor of more militant leaders like Karl Frank.

<sup>169</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 4. By this point in Czech-German history, a large number of amphibians had already been classified as either German or Czech, primarily due to the Nazis’ obsession with race and nationality. Those that remained, however, were still subject to the often arbitrary determination of national identity by the government, in order to expedite the expulsion process.



first and, I believe, the most terrible one. It affected apparently some 800 persons.<sup>170</sup>

One can only imagine the horror experienced by the Wollmanns, who had spent twelve hours hoping that the expulsions would be stopped for good, before discovering that they were indeed going to be “irrevocably” expelled. Wollmann and his wife were initially lucky in that the Soviet authorities had refused to allow them to be expelled, but, for reasons unbeknownst to the reader (and possibly to Wollmann himself), the order was reinstituted and executed in the same day. The fact that Wollmann even considered protesting to the Russian authorities also indicates the power they exerted as soon as they entered Czechoslovakia. That power would later be used to overthrow the administration of Edvard Beneš, but at this point, the Soviets represented a last hope for salvation from Czech violence, as well as an unknown and uncertain future.

Aside from the Soviet intervention, however, Wollmann’s experience of his hopes being dashed by the harsh reality of the expulsions was common to several accounts of the expulsions.<sup>171</sup> For instance, F.P., a farmer from Heinrichschlag, had heard rumors that the Germans were going to be forced to leave, but “no one believed it.” Furthermore, the “Czech mayor” of the town (whose presence could indicate an ethnically-mixed community) told the Germans that those rumors were untrue. This assurance that they would be allowed to stay only added to the Germans’ anguish at being forced out of their

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<sup>170</sup> Schieder, No. 78, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 462-463.

<sup>171</sup> Schieder, No. 37, “Report of experiences (letter) of Hubert Schütz sen., businessman and former town councilor, of Jägerndorf,” 410-414; No. 50, “Report by Hermann Schubert, parson, of Trautenau,” 421-429, both in *Documents on the Expulsion*; and Schieder, Nr. 73, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 375-377. Schütz writes of the widespread belief among the Germans in his town that they would be allowed to return to their homes after an inspection. Despite the rumors, they were really marched to an internment camp before being expelled. Schubert writes of the “mean lie” that the Germans would be allowed to return after being sent away. He asserts that the “Czech robbers” intentionally misled the Germans and took advantage of their absence to loot German homes and flats. A.B. reports that a Russian soldier told the German refugees that they were all going home, but that it was all a bluff and a way to keep the expellees under control while they waited for transportation.

homes, as it intensified their shock at their predicament.<sup>172</sup> E.H., a civil engineer from Teplitz-Schönau, also experienced the pain of rumors that gave the expellees false hope about their fates, as rumors began to spread that the people who were removed from various towns were taken to camps and would later be able to return. He claims that those rumors were started deliberately, although who would have started them is unclear. He also asserts that the expellees were isolated from the other Germans, so that no one could know the truth about the expulsions or the underlying falsehood behind the rumor about refugees being allowed to return home.<sup>173</sup> Whether the transferee's hopes came from actual changes in the situation, such as Wollmann, or from rumors and hearsay, as in the cases of F.P. and E.H., the expellees certainly wished to be saved from their plight, and any source of hope in the midst of the chaos was welcome. Unfortunately, most of those sources of hope gave the expellees a false sense of the lasting reality of the situation and may have only served to increase the feelings of disbelief and shock among the expelled population. After the surprise of the initial order of expulsion, the possibility that the whole situation could be reversed was obviously appealing to the desperate expellees.

More interesting than even the rumors and reversals swirling around the orders of expulsion is the way Wollmann frames his experience. He claims that "This expulsion was the first and, I believe, the most terrible one." Whether or not this assertion is true, he establishes his experience as not only terrible for him, but the "most terrible" of all the expulsions. There are certainly other accounts that would seem to conflict with this assertion, but looking solely at Wollmann's words from his perspective, of course he thinks his experiences were the "most terrible" of all. It would be surprising to find a

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<sup>172</sup> Schieder, Nr. 94, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 432-433.

<sup>173</sup> Schieder, No. 87, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 467-469.

refugee from this or any other conflict who did not find his or her own personal story to be more harrowing and traumatic than any other. Wollmann also had the benefit of nearly ten years to gain perspective on his experiences before recording them, which may have influenced his decision to call his own expulsion the “most terrible one,” due to whatever personal suffering he faced after he crossed into Germany.

The tendency to focus on one’s own experiences is understandable, but it also speaks to the profound way that memory influences not only personal history, but collective history. Personal memories of an event are inherently subjective, as they filter apparently objective facts through a lens of individual beliefs and opinions. Collective memory, on the other hand, as well as collective history, collects many of these unique experiences and perspectives to construct the event in the minds of a group. The individuals involved may have all endured the same traumas and survived the same ordeals, but no two accounts will ever be exactly identical. The fundamental shape of the event will be altered by each unique version of what appears to be the same story. In the case of the Sudeten Germans, who had many differing accounts of the expulsions, their ethnic identity continues to be inextricably linked to their collective recollection of these events. Their ability to draw on personal, familial, and group memories of this traumatic event provides them with a foundation on which to build a sense of community. Since the Sudeten Germans now have no concrete link to their homeland, those collective memories are one of the main ways the group is able to maintain its unity.

The expulsions themselves were extremely distressing for the Germans, who found themselves encamped in atrocious conditions, before being forced over the border into Germany, Austria, and Poland. Many forced marches took place, with hundreds and

even thousands of primarily women and children being pushed to the border, escorted by armed soldiers and police, with many deaths along the way. In Wollmann's case, he and his wife left their home for the "uncertain future," without most of their belongings, but their trials, at least as remembered by Wollmann, were only just beginning when they reached the gathering point at the train station.

In the station hall, all persons to be expelled and all their possessions were subjected to a strict search. This consisted in indiscriminately confiscating all cash, all documents, all watches, knives, razors, i.e. everything that could be utilized. All new or fairly new articles of clothing and shoes were taken away; whoever was dressed in anything that seemed new, had to take it off and put on old things which, if necessary were taken from other persons. Anyone resisting or objecting to this treatment, even if very shyly, was abused in the most vulgar fashion and beaten. Everybody was bodily searched, even female persons had to submit to the young lads. In the real and literal sense of the word, we left the room as beggars.<sup>174</sup>

These searches of personal belongings are the subject of near-universal complaints among all German expellees, including those who went through the "organized transfers," as Czech guards pocketed their valuables and basic goods.<sup>175</sup> Because these Germans had been forced to leave the majority of their belongings at home to begin with, the fact that the Czechs would take what they had left seemed especially cruel. This looting was particularly an issue during the "wild transfers," because there were no regulations on how much luggage the refugees were required to have in order to

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<sup>174</sup> Schieder, No. 78, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 462-463.

<sup>175</sup> Schieder, No. 71, "Report of the experiences of Hermine Mückusch, housewife, of Jägerndorf," 453-462; No. 80, 463-464; No. 82, 464-467; No. 87, 467-469; No. 90, 469-472; No. 99, "Report of the experiences of Dr. Karl Grimm, doctor of medicine in Brüx," 489-495, all in *Documents on the Expulsion*; and Schieder, Nr. 73, 375-377; Nr. 74, "Bericht des Landwirtes K.A. aus Hohenfeld, Kreis Zittau," 377-378; Nr. 75, "Bericht des Notars Dr. Leopold Pfitzner aus Oderberg," abdruck aus "Landskroner Heimatbrief," 9 Jahrgang, Folge 2 (Juli 1955); and Nr. 79, "Erlebnisbericht des P.K. aus Friedland (Isergebirge)," 387-389, all in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*. Most of these accounts deal with the "wild transfers," where some looting might be anticipated. The account of Dr. Karl Grimm, however, deals with the "organized transfers," which were intended to be less dangerous to the persons and belongings involved. He describes the theft of "money, cigarettes, objects of value and furs" by the official at the camps, which he asserts were used to "[line] their own pockets."

cross the border, and the looting of German suitcases left them “as beggars.” The effects were especially acute when they were pushed over the border into a strange land that had few resources to support them while they attempted to restart their lives. The confiscation of money and documents was particularly significant, because it stripped the Germans of their means to replace their goods, as well as their tools of identification. For a people that had prided itself on its connection to its land and community, this was an extremely difficult reality to accept. They had also undoubtedly been influenced by the message of German superiority that had infiltrated their identities during the Nazi regime and felt entitled to their money and possessions. Instead of remaining in their homes and enjoying the fruits of their labors, the expellees now not only had to leave their homeland for a strange new country, but they had to reinvent their lives without the resources to do so. For the Czechs, however, it was simply a matter of taking from the Germans what they felt was owed to them for the trials of the previous six years of occupation.

The idea of taking “old things which, if necessary were taken from other persons,” is a particular aspect of Wollmann’s account that does not often appear in other recollections of the expulsions. Sometimes luggage was redistributed during the “organized transfers” to obtain the correct luggage weight per person to get a transport across the border, but Wollmann is uniquely focused on the quality of the goods he and his wife were allowed to keep. Others mention, of course, the theft of their belongings from their bags, but few, if any, refer to the replacement of their things with those of other expellees. This interchangeability of goods illustrates the lack of Czech respect for German feelings and emotions about the sudden upheaval in all spheres of their lives. The Germans had been taken from their homes in wild disarray, leaving behind

everything they knew, and faced with near-constant brutality during their journey to a new land. Far from being concerned with the Germans' comfort, however, the Czechs seemed focused on taking what they could from the Germans and getting them out as quickly as possible, regardless of their health or other physical conditions. Of course, the instability in the author's life did not make him particularly interested in portraying the Czechs in a sympathetic light, but even a Czech record of this period indicates that conditions for the expellees during this period were "excessively harsh."<sup>176</sup> From all accounts, German life was decidedly difficult in this period, and the people interned and expelled were generally left with little or nothing that they could use to support themselves.

The handling of people "resisting or objecting to this treatment" was especially offensive to the sensibilities of the Germans from both the Sudetenland in western Czechoslovakia and the eastern "linguistic islands," although the Czechs often modeled their abuses on the rumored and observed actions of Nazis during the occupation. Because of their oppression under the Nazis, many Czechs expressed their hostility towards the Germans through their rough treatment of the internees and expellees. In order to keep the expellees under control, the guards and administrators often used violence and fear to enforce obedience. Men, women, and children were often beaten to enforce the subordination of the Germans to the Czechs after the Nazis fell from power. Even though such brutal treatment seems counterintuitive, especially after six years of similar brutality from the Nazis, the Czechs felt a certain desire to exact their revenge on their perceived oppressors. To some degree, perhaps this desire for retribution was justified. The fact that the Czechs used violence to achieve political aims, however, in

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<sup>176</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 272.

order to expel the Germans without international support, calls into question their whole approach to the situation.

The leaders of Czechoslovakia were certainly concerned with eliminating the German threat to the Republic, but the fact that they were willing to tolerate human rights violations and outright violence against their former citizens casted doubt on their commitment to diplomacy and democracy. Rather than coming down against the “wild transfers,” the government actually gave amnesty to people who brutalized and robbed Germans, undermining Czechoslovakia’s credibility as a democratic, “Western” nation.<sup>177</sup> While the troops and police on the ground, who were dealing directly with the Germans and deciding how brutally to treat them, may not have been extremely concerned with the international repercussions of the forced migration of millions of civilians, it seems odd that the government would so fully ignore those consequences too. Of course, the post-expulsion years were full of reasoning and rationalization, because once the immediate, emotional activity of the transfers was over, the rest of the world started questioning Czech actions and the Czechs had to answer for their behavior towards the Sudeten Germans, particularly during the “wild transfers.”<sup>178</sup> All the explanations in the world cannot change the reality of the situation, however, and the fact remains that both the Czechs and the Germans have had to face their recent pasts to truly make progress as nations.

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<sup>177</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 259.

<sup>178</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 277. Luža argues that, “Except for the first few angry weeks of reprisal, the measure was taken not as an act of revenge but as an act of obligation in order to maintain the national existence and safeguard the independence of the state, since Czechoslovakia was determined that her experiences of the past should never happen again.” This claim stands in stark contrast to the German accounts from this period, but it makes sense in light of the fact that the “wild transfers” became something of a black mark on the Czech record and they are still struggling with the consequences of their actions in this period.

After searches of their persons and possessions were completed, the German expellees found that the challenges were not yet over. Rather, they faced a difficult journey into Germany, where there were few resources to support them and their families.

Then we were loaded into wagons. It was after midnight when our train of cattle trucks left, plastered with slogans 'Heil Hitler' and 'Home into the Reich.' The train stopped between the frontiers in the open fields, in the pitch darkness we had to get out accompanied by sneering laughter. Poles and Russians were in wait for us and if anyone had salvaged anything, it was taken now. Shots rang out and the night was filled with screams. Only a few found some shelter, most had to camp in the open. Nobody knew where to go the next day at the start of an uncertain future. We had arrived on German soil in the area of Görlitz and spent the first few months there – just as long as the only available food for expellees lasted, i.e. potatoes in stacks in the fields whose owners had not yet returned. Bread was unobtainable. The whole district was crowded with refugees from the east and the Sudetenland; it was said that they numbered up to 100,000. It was not surprising that we all lost our strength rapidly and that the death rate was very high.<sup>179</sup>

Cattle and coal wagons, like those described by Wollmann, were the most common means of transportation for the expellees, especially during the “wild” period, when there were no regulations on the necessity of heat, food, or protection from the elements like those established during the “organized” period.<sup>180</sup> Often, these cattle cars or carts exposed their passengers to the rain and cold with little concern for their safety.<sup>181</sup> Because many of the people traveling in these train cars and carts were children and the elderly, this exposure was particularly difficult to bear and certainly contributed to the death toll during this period. The people who were able to ride in the train wagons,

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<sup>179</sup> Schieder, No. 78, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 462-463.

<sup>180</sup> Schieder, “Minutes of the talks between representatives,” *Documents on the Expulsion*, 312-315.

<sup>181</sup> Schieder, No. 80, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 463-464; and Schieder, Nr. 72, “Erlebnisbericht des M.H. aus Jägerndorf,” 373-375; Nr. 73, 375-377; Nr. 91, 415-416; Nr. 94, 432-433, all in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*. These various accounts tell of trucks, lorries, trains, and carts, all of which were used in the process of carrying Germans across the German, Austrian, and Polish borders.



however, were relatively lucky, compared to those Germans who were forced to march for miles to the border, with many of the old, sick, and injured dying along the way.<sup>182</sup> These marches, which will be discussed further below, were often called “death marches,” because of the huge numbers of people who died on the journey. Even more than the expulsions by train, marches on foot showed the desire of the Czechs to expel the Germans through any means available, because they were willing to push even the elderly and sick to the border with whips and guns and leave them essentially helpless on the other side, rather than wait for trains and carts to become available. In either case, the Czechs were not particularly concerned with German comfort or wellbeing, as they were working to eliminate a perceived threat to their newly-formed state as quickly as possible. These harsh conditions only contributed further to the sense of disbelief felt by the Germans, as well as their feelings of injustice about their treatment at the hands of the Czechs. To the Germans, most of whom did not feel any sense of responsibility for the crimes of the Nazis, this harsh treatment was not only extreme and humiliating, but also entirely unjustified.

Adding to the humiliation was the barrage of insults thrown at the expellees as they endured their journey, which commonly either identified them as Nazis or simply treated them as animals like dogs and pigs. Women were singled out as “whores” and “sluts” by the guards, degrading and dehumanizing them still further as they progressed towards the border.<sup>183</sup> The attacks that focused on the alleged Nazi loyalties of the

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<sup>182</sup> Schieder, No. 80, 463-464; No. 87, 467-469; and No. 90, 469-472, all in *Documents on the Expulsion*; and Schieder, Nr. 75, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 379-380.

<sup>183</sup> Schieder, No. 29, “Report of the experiences of Kurt Schmidt, civil engineer,” 399-409; No. 87, 464-467, both in *Documents on the Expulsion*; and Schieder, Nr. 72, 373-375; Nr. 73, 375-377; Nr. 75, 379-380, all in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*. The account of Kurt Schmidt captures Czech hostility towards Germans when he writes of the fact that produce was allowed to rot in the fields because the Czechs would “rather give it to the pigs than to the Germans.” He also mentions the epithets used for the women in the

expellees clearly stuck with Wollmann, as he obviously felt uncomfortable with the labels of “Heil Hitler” that decorated the train carrying him into Germany. As he did at the beginning of his account, Wollmann defends himself against the allegations of Nazism by mentioning the Czech assumptions of collective guilt on the part of the Germans. It is not clear whether or not Wollmann was aware of the audience that would later read his account, but that may have influenced his portrayal of his own beliefs and actions before and during the expulsions. Regardless, he makes a concerted effort to represent himself as an anti-fascist at every possible opportunity, including at this point in his story, which is also one of the most significant, as it shows the expellees’ final break with the homeland.

Interestingly, Wollmann’s is one of the only accounts that mention abuse that goes beyond simple verbal attacks, to include descriptions of physical markings on the sides of the cattle cars that labeled the Germans as Nazis to everyone who could see them on their journey. Another account, from O.F., a teacher in the Saaz district, does tell of a search for portraits of Hitler among the expellees and Czech threats of violence if any were found.<sup>184</sup> The meaning behind this behavior could simply show the thorough identification of Germans with Nazis in the minds of the Czechs and their belief that all Germans were Nazis. On the other hand, the presence of even a few pictures of Hitler would seem to indicate a certain affinity for the Nazi cause among at least some of the expellees. O.F. unfortunately does not record the conclusion of this search, so it is impossible to know if any pictures were found. If there was no risk of finding any such pictures among the expellees’ belongings, however, threats of retribution would not have

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expelled groups. The other accounts also mention the verbal insults used on Germans, including calling them “dogs” and “swine.”

<sup>184</sup> Schieder, Nr. 91, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 415-416.

been so significant that O.F. felt the need to record it over five years after her journey to Germany ended.

The end of that journey was the final trauma for the expellees, as they were unceremoniously abandoned, often in the countryside, with few to no belongings and nowhere to go. Wollmann's account of the final theft of the expellees' belongings is heart-wrenching, as it leaves the reader with a sense of the absolute destitution of the Germans who experienced these expulsions. Just when the expellees in his transport thought that they had made it safely through the searches and lootings of the Czech guards, they found themselves at the mercy of armed Polish and Russian soldiers, who were only too happy to relieve them of their few remaining belongings. The threat of violence still hung over the proceedings, as the bedraggled expellees were once again scared into submission by unsympathetic forces.

Even more upsetting for the expellees was the lack of shelter and opportunities to rebuild their lives, because they were entirely unprepared to be homeless, with little money and few personal belongings left to their names, if they had anything left at all. Wollmann does not go into great detail here about the conditions, but the fact that the expelled Germans were forced to resort to stealing crops from farmers' fields clearly shows the quality of their lives. Without any other sources of food and few options about where to go, the expelled were forced to scrape by with dwindling supplies in an overcrowded area. It seems that Wollmann and his fellow townspeople were among a large number of other expellees from various areas of Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe, and his estimation of 100,000 may actually be fairly accurate. He does admit that this number was based on hearsay, but it serves the purpose of showing the toll the

expulsions took on the receiving areas in Germany, as well as the misery of the expellees themselves. The fact that 450,000 Sudeten Germans were loaded into trains and sent to Germany before July 1945 also backs up his statement.<sup>185</sup> Wollmann, who was expelled in June, may well have been among 100,000 refugees concentrated in eastern Germany as thousands more expellees crossed the border every day. Although there have now been studies to determine exactly how many people were affected by the “wild transfers,” rumors about the expulsions among the expellees, including estimations of how many people were being transferred, played a major role in both shaping German understandings of their situation and giving them false hope that their fates might be reversed so that they could return home.

The hope of the expellees that they might be able to go back to their homeland was certainly fueled by the devastation they found in Germany, which had little capacity to accommodate the vast numbers of transferees pouring across the border every day. An extreme lack of supervision and coordination led to the overcrowding of certain areas and the high death rate Wollmann mentions. Loss of strength and increased rates of illness among expellees is not uncommon in the accounts of the transfers, as many people suffered from serious illnesses and lice due to poor hygienic facilities and abysmal living conditions.<sup>186</sup> Furthermore, because of the limited availability of food, it was difficult for expellees to recover from their physical ordeals. They had to find a way to survive and many of them did so by trekking further into the interior of Germany, either alone or with

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<sup>185</sup> Bryant, *Prague in Black*, 239. Bryant also mentions that 5,000 Germans were transferred every day during the month of July, pushing more refugees into the already overcrowded border regions of Germany.

<sup>186</sup> Schieder, No. 71, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 453-462; and Schieder, Nr. 75, 379-380, Nr. 91, 415-416, both in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*.

their family members, in an attempt to escape the crush of people that greatly reduced the availability of housing, employment, and supplies.

Wollmann's account establishes the basic frame of the "wild transfers," but his story does not address several other significant aspects of the transfers, including physical and sexual violence, the forced marches across the border, and suicide attempts by desperate expellees. Certain of these elements of the expulsions are understandably left out of Wollmann's account, because of his perspective and individual experiences. For instance, as a man, he would have been less likely to experience sexual violence, and he does not report his wife as being a target of such attacks. He and his wife were also transported in trains, rather than forced to march, and he does not mention any suicide attempts, either by himself, his wife, or anyone traveling with them. These aspects of the expulsions left lasting impressions on those people who did experience them, however, so they are worth examining, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the impact these events had on the expellees.

The first element that must be considered is the targeting of women for sexual and physical abuse by both Czechs and the Soviet occupying forces both before and during the expulsion process. Part of the explanation behind their behavior may have been the fact that many young German men had left their families behind to fight in the war, which meant that the Germans left in the villages and cities of Czechoslovakia were generally the most vulnerable members of society: women, children, and the elderly. This vulnerability undoubtedly made the expulsions easier, since those groups of people were probably less likely to resist the harsh treatment than younger men, but it also made it easier to exploit the expellees and abuse them along their journey. That exploitation could

take the form of physical violence, often coming from mobs and specifically from other women, or involve rapes and sexual abuse, against which women had little to no protection.

The physical violence experienced by women in the earliest stages of the expulsions was often inflicted by mobs, which usually included Czech women. The violent men and women in these crowds do not seem to have belonged to any official governmental organization or been members of the military or police. These were just ordinary people who were unleashing their resentment and hostility towards the Germans by brutally attacking German women. For instance, A.L., a member of the Women's Signal Corps in Prague, recounts her story as an interned German during the initial uprising in Prague in the spring of 1945. She describes the labor she and other "women without children" were forced to carry out amidst large crowds of hostile Czechs. She reports being beaten, having her teeth knocked out and her hair shorn off with scissors in the middle of the street while she and other women were working to clear barricades and debris from the streets of Prague. The violence did not entirely come from women, either, as she writes of the men and boys who kicked and beat the forced laborers, causing some of them to attempt to escape into the river.<sup>187</sup> It seems that the women working to clear the streets of Prague, as A.L. did, were in particular danger, as Kurt Schmidt, a civil engineer from Brünn, reported similar violence against the women interned in his area. Schmidt also mentions women's hair being cut off, but he makes it even more difficult to stomach the image of women being beaten and harassed when he reports that "old age was no protection." Even the elderly women in these groups of laborers were not safe

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<sup>187</sup> Schieder, No. 26, "Report of the experiences of A.L., once a member of the Women's Signal Corp in Prague," *Documents on the Expulsion*, 388-390.

from the vengeance of the Czech mobs.<sup>188</sup> Any woman who was sent out to work in the streets could become a target for humiliation, as in the cases of women's hair being cut off, or dangerous physical attacks, as in the situations where mobs formed and began beating and abusing these women.

On one hand, these stories are horrifying and represent the very real threat posed by the Czechs to the Germans' very lives. On the other hand, these attacks took place almost immediately after the fall of the Nazi regime, when Czech national and anti-German sentiments were at their height. Not only had the Czechs suffered through six years of occupation, but they were suddenly given a chance to express their frustration and anger before order was fully restored. The interesting part of these attacks, however, is not the fact that they happened, since violence against the Germans was an almost inevitable consequence of the power vacuum left by the Nazis, but rather that they seem to have been relatively focused on women, particularly unmarried women without families. Men were certainly victims of brutality at the hands of Czechs during the expulsions, but this mob violence, at least from the sources available, appears to have been an almost exclusively female experience. The lack of a male presence in many areas, due to the participation of many Sudeten German men in the Nazi war effort, may have contributed to the overwhelmingly female experience of beatings in the streets. The two stories above coincide neatly enough to assume that these cases may not have been anomalies. Violence against women, particularly of a sexual nature, was even more common than these examples would indicate, and were mentioned by numerous expellees as a serious concern during the expulsions.

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<sup>188</sup> Schieder, No. 29, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 399-409.

One of the most universal events in reports of the expulsions is the rape and abuse of girls and young women at the hands of the Czechs and Soviet forces. Numerous expellees, both male and female, report the widespread fear and horrific reality of sexual assault that were fundamental elements of the expulsion process for many women. Kurt Schmidt, who reported one of the above cases of physical violence against women, writes the following about the situation in the camp where he was interned:

The women were completely at the mercy of the Russians and Czechs, everybody came and selected what suited him, and when the children cried about their mothers, they were brutally silenced. If any man had tried to protect his wife, he would have risked to be killed. The Russians, and the Czechs as well, often did not even trouble to take the women away – amongst the children and in view of all the inmates of the camp, they behaved like animals. During the nights one could hear the moaning and whimpering of these poor women.<sup>189</sup>

Schmidt describes a sort of marketplace, where Soviets and Czechs could exploit their captives as they pleased, which was not an uncommon practice among the guards and soldiers who surrounded the internment camps and accompanied the expellees on their journey. This indiscriminate abuse of their coercive power led to a genuine fear of the soldiers and guards among the expellees, and that fear was obviously not misplaced. Fear of the Soviets was particularly strong, as they were strangers and were seen as an unstoppable force against whom “no woman was safe.”<sup>190</sup> The Czechs were not blameless either, though, as the report of Hermine Mückusch makes clear when she tells of a “makeshift slave market” where the Czechs could select girls as young as fifteen

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<sup>189</sup> Schieder, No. 29, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 299-409.

<sup>190</sup> Schieder, No. 39, “Report of the experiences of Elisabeth Peschke, farmer’s wife, of Seifersdorf, district Jägerndorf,” *Documents on the Expulsion*, 415-421. Peschke writes of her nieces running for cover when they hear the Soviets are coming, and she also states that “no woman was safe from the Russians, not even older ones,” showing the deep sense that the Soviets would be able to do whatever they wanted and the fear of Soviet power that was instilled in the women and girls of Czechoslovakia.



years old.<sup>191</sup> In other cases, the Czechs were merely complicit in Soviet abuses by failing to prevent the sexual assault by the soldiers.<sup>192</sup> According to Schmidt, these soldiers “behaved like animals,” without consideration of their victims or their families and without any fear of retribution. Thus, the threat of rape surrounded the female expellees and their families and added to the trauma and stress of the expulsion process as a whole. The overwhelming fear of the Soviet soldiers made it nearly impossible for women or their families to resist this treatment or escape the “selection.” Schmidt does not go into details about how exactly the Soviets “brutally silenced” the children, but one can imagine that the threat of death hovered over everyone in the camp, regardless of age.

The rape of “enemy” women is not a modern phenomenon, as it has been a despicable aspect of war for centuries. In the case of these expulsions, however, it seems especially cruel, as the women selected as victims of Soviet and Czech abuse were among the most vulnerable possible targets. They had just been forced out of their homes and taken to camps or pushed towards the border, and on top of the physical violence and threat of death that hung over them, they also had to be constantly aware of the fact that they could be the next victims of sexual violence. The near-universality of the claims of rape by the Soviet and Czech forces would seem to indicate that it was a very serious and very real problem for the already overwhelmed and exhausted expellees. Even for the men who were present and wanted to protect their wives and daughters, it was almost impossible to do so, since they faced death if they resisted. The whole experience added to the humiliation and emasculation of the German expellees, turning an already painful experience into an overwhelmingly traumatic one.

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<sup>191</sup> Schieder, No. 71, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 453-462.

<sup>192</sup> Schieder, No. 87, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 467-469.

During the Nazi occupation of Central Europe, rape of “enemy” women and coercive sexual relationships with women from occupied territories were not uncommon. In fact, German soldiers may have had a wide variety of sexual contacts with women from occupied areas, including “violent rape; contact with sexual slaves, voluntary brothel workers, and prostitutes on the street; and ‘prostitutional relationships’: stable arrangements in which the man supplied the woman with food or protection.”<sup>193</sup> It should come as no surprise that soldiers, after being away from home for weeks or months at a time, felt the need to satisfy their sexual desires. On the other hand, the variety of forms of relationships between Germans and women in occupied Europe shows the way sexuality was used both against women and as a tool for their benefit. Rape may have served as a method of controlling the population through violence and humiliation. In fact, the German army expected that “occupied populations could be compelled to provide sex just as they supplied food and labor.”<sup>194</sup> Sexual exploitation was therefore part of the Nazi ideology of the inherent inferiority of other peoples, and the soldiers of the German army were not only expected to engage in sexual liaisons with women in occupied territories, but to use those women as they saw fit.

The “prostitutional relationships” some women undertook to survive during the occupation were little more than coerced relationships created on the basis of the exchange of goods or protection by the soldier for services provided by the woman. It could be argued that these relationships were better, somehow, than the explicit rape of women, but the fact that the soldiers held all the power meant that the sexual aspect of the relationship could never be fully consensual. Even in the cases where women used their

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<sup>193</sup> Elizabeth Heineman, “Gender, Sexuality, and Coming to Terms with the Nazi past.” *Central European History*, 38, no. 2 (Cambridge University Press, 2005) 48.

<sup>194</sup> Heineman, “Gender, Sexuality, and Coming to Terms,” 48.

sexual contacts with German soldiers to gain material advantages and protection from further violence, rape was a fairly common practice during the occupation, so it is not very surprising that such actions would continue in the postwar period. Similar “prostitutional relationships” arose between German women and the Soviet soldiers who violated them, as German women attempted to cope with and overcome the violence they faced during the chaos of the postwar period.<sup>195</sup> The existence of these relationships during World War II makes it easier to understand why the Soviet soldiers behaved this way after the war, since the structure of these kinds of coercive relationships was already established.

When women began to come forward after the war with claims of rape at the hands of the Red Army, the fear that Germans would be entirely perceived as victims, instead of remembering the Nazi past, came to the forefront. The danger of collective memory is that it allows majority opinions about an event to overpower individual memories. In this way, it can distort the public understanding of an event or period, potentially obscuring elements of the past that the majority wishes to forget. This distortion was the reason for the fear of turning German women into victims, because there was a sense that the collective German memory would focus on the population transfers and rapes, rather than the lasting consequences of Nazi rule. The resistance of the Germans to accept Soviet rule compounded that fear, since accounts of German victimhood, like those recording the “wild transfers,” could overshadow the most horrific events of the Nazi regime in favor of showing the horrors of Soviet life.<sup>196</sup> The Western powers, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, were likely somewhat

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<sup>195</sup> Atina Grossman, “A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers,” *Berlin 1945: War and Rape “Liberators Take Liberties*, 72 (The MIT Press: 1995) 54.

<sup>196</sup> Grossman, “A Question of Silence,” 45.

expecting Soviet soldiers to rape women, because of their own prejudices against Stalin and the Soviet Union. There were, of course, a huge number of rapes during the immediate postwar period, during which the “wild transfers” also took place. In fact, it is possible that “one out of every three of about one and a half million women in Berlin at the end of the war were raped,” including the “notorious week of ‘mass rapes,’ from April 24 to May 5, 1945,” when the Soviets finally took over Berlin.<sup>197</sup> It is hard to pinpoint exactly how many women suffered at the hands of the Soviets, because of the nature of the crime and its widespread nature. There is some data, but many women were ashamed of what happened to them or were not in a position to report the crime because of the unstable and violent environment surrounding them or their location in rural areas. For the women who were forced to migrate during the “wild transfers,” that instability was even greater, due to their lack of resources or protection provided by the Czech and Soviet forces accompanying them.

The fact that Nazi propaganda had long portrayed the “Red Army ‘horde’” as “bestial” and “animalistic” made the German people even more willing to accept their role as victims of Soviet violence.<sup>198</sup> The mass rapes only reinforced the reputation of the Soviets as uncivilized, violent animals. In fact, German women expected the Soviet Army to rape and pillage as they advanced, largely due to the Nazi efforts to portray the Soviets as the “Red Beast” that was marching westward.<sup>199</sup> This expectation that the Soviets would behave like beasts created fear among the women in both Germany itself and the eastern territories, and made the actual rapes that occurred easier to rationalize and fit into an existing sense among Germans that they were purely victims of cruelty at

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<sup>197</sup> Grossman, “A Question of Silence,” 46.

<sup>198</sup> Grossman, “A Question of Silence,” 48.

<sup>199</sup> Grossman, “A Question of Silence,” 50.

the hands of the occupying army, rather than former supporters or beneficiaries of a different brand of violence in the form of Nazism. As Schmidt's account above shows, the behavior of the Soviets, particularly in terms of their willingness to rape women in the middle of a camp full of prisoners, did little to change the image of the Soviet soldier as a bestial predator. The pain experienced by the women who were raped was very real, but the incorporation of their suffering into the existing Nazi ideology about the Soviets made the recording of the crimes appear more subjective than even the general accounts of the transfers.

If the expellees survived the physical and sexual abuse of the Czech and Soviet guards, they were often faced with the unimaginable ordeal of marching on foot to the border, where they would be forced out of their homeland once and for all. Some Germans were fortunate enough to be transported by train or car to the border, but many were herded towards Germany, Austria, or Poland in long columns, carrying all the possessions they still had. They were urged forward by the constant threat of violence and death that hung over them on their journey. The Czechs and Soviets also used the expellee's desire to return home against them, telling them that they would be able to return after the expulsions were over. This mental and emotional abuse, on top of the other trials and difficulties the expellees faced, only increased their suffering and traumatized the expellees still further. Many of the so-called "death marches" took days and even weeks to complete, and hunger, disease, and abuse caused the deaths of many Germans along the way. The fact that the Germans who were marching were often women, children, and the elderly increased the casualties, as they were more vulnerable to sickness and violence.

One of the most heart-wrenching stories comes from Hermine Mückusch, who also recorded incidents sexual violence perpetrated by the Soviets and Czechs on the journey. She describes this scene after several days of marching:

It was a terrible sight which our transport now presented. The young mothers with their children sat on the side of the road, dirty and partly without shoes, thirsty and emaciated. The older children, red in their faces from fever and heat, lay in the grass, asking for something to drink, which we were unable to give them as the Czech had made no arrangements whatsoever to look after these transports. It seemed that they had deliberately omitted to supply food or drink so that people should perish.<sup>200</sup>

Mückusch describes, in graphic detail, the horrible conditions in which the Germans were forced to survive during these marches. The expellees, who were marching in the June heat, were left with little or nothing to eat or drink. Looking at the situation from the expellees' perspective, it is understandable that they would see the lack of rations as an intentional act of neglect by the Czechs. It is possible that, in their hurry to evacuate the Germans, the Czechs simply overlooked the logistics of moving thousands of people safely, but if that were the case, the Czech government should have put a stop to the expulsions as soon as it could. Instead, the expulsions continued for months, resulting in further deaths and illnesses that made the transition of the expelled Sudeten Germans into German society that much harder. The fact that there were children sitting by the side of the road, "thirsty and emaciated," as well as "red in their faces from fever and heat," with no way for their parents to rectify the situation, shows how little concern the Czechs had for the people on these journeys. The Czechs and Soviets who were running the expulsions gave the expellees a "few crumbs of bread" at most every day, even though they were walking extremely long distances in the summer heat, with

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<sup>200</sup> Schieder, No. 71, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 459-460.

many children and elderly people among their numbers.<sup>201</sup> A few crumbs of bread were better than nothing, but many marches were carried out with fewer provisions than that. Some expellees had “no food at all,” and nothing even to give the pregnant women in their parties, who needed nutrients and water more than anyone.<sup>202</sup> Indeed, the absence of food and water made the experience of the forced marches even more harrowing, since the expellees were unable to feed themselves or their children, as well as being stripped of their belongings and forced into unknown lands.

The lack of food and water given to the expellees only exacerbated their suffering as they were hurried towards the borders with violence and physical abuse. If anyone was unable to continue marching, they were harassed, beaten, and sometimes killed. Mückusch writes of the “shots and the cracking of whips” that chased the expellees along their journey, and other expellees recorded similar experiences, with guns and whips used by the guards as motivation for the marching columns.<sup>203</sup> Even when they were faced with exhaustion, the expellees had no choice but to continue, since any slowing or stopping would be met with violence and death at the hands of the Czechs and Soviets. The sick were not spared from the brutality, as they were expected to keep up with the march, regardless of their health. Adalbert Ehm writes of those who could not keep up, who were beaten until they started moving again, or were shot when they still could not move quickly enough. He also describes the experience of being forced to run up a mountain at gunpoint, and tells of the horror of watching men die in front of him.<sup>204</sup> Stories such as these exemplify the terror and pain caused by the Czechs as they hurried

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<sup>201</sup> Schieder, No. 71, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 457.

<sup>202</sup> Schieder, No. 87, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 467-469.

<sup>203</sup> Schieder, No. 71, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 458.

<sup>204</sup> Schieder, No. 90, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 469-472.

the Germans towards the borders, more concerned with the end result of total expulsion than the methods they used to achieve that goal.

Arriving in Germany, Austria, or Poland was not the end of the ordeal for the Germans, however, as many of them were obliged to continue their marches as they looked for work, food, and a place to stay. Because so many of the expellees included children and the elderly, it was often difficult for their families to find a suitable place to settle. The huge numbers of expellees pouring into the border regions only made things worse. Many of these refugees were “contaminated with lice, racked by fever, covered with boils,” and with nowhere to turn, but they had to find a way to survive.<sup>205</sup> The illnesses and hunger of the expulsions did not disappear at the border, since the expellees were entering war-torn countries with few belongings and even fewer prospects of a stable life. Forced by circumstance to wander their strange new countries, some were able to find work and a relatively secure home, but others were reduced to begging and living off scraps.<sup>206</sup> For all of the expellees, the experience was traumatic and life-changing, but for those who had to march across the border on their own two feet, followed closely by Czechs and Soviets with guns and sharp whips, it was a particularly painful trial.

For some Germans, the experience of the expulsions was too traumatic to bear, and many of them never even made it as far as the border. The combination of hostility, verbal and physical abuse, and the uncertainty of the future resulted in a large number of suicides among expellees. Those Germans who could not handle the terrible reality of the

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<sup>205</sup> Schieder, Nr. 91, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 415-416.

<sup>206</sup> Schieder, No. 87, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 467-469, Schieder, Nr. 91, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 415-416. The first account relates the trials of E.H. and his family after they crossed the border. They were shuffled from town to town until they were “generously” given an opportunity to work and become part of a community after weeks of upheaval. The second briefly describes the “four weeks of hunger” and “wandering” experienced by O.F. after arriving in Germany.



“wild transfers” were desperate to escape the violence and fear that surrounded them as they were forced out of their homes. Many expellees witnessed suicides or heard the rumors swirling around as people disappeared and died around them. Even before the expulsions began, many Germans committed suicide upon getting the news that they would have to leave. Women and girls living in fear of sexual assault were particularly likely to commit suicide, in their desperation to escape the threat of rape and humiliation at the hands of the Soviets.<sup>207</sup> Once the expulsions began, suicide was, for some Germans, the only method of coping with the shocking news that they were no longer welcome in their homeland. These Germans included an old woman who was so surprised she “was trembling all over and shaking her head, she could not comprehend what was happening.” This 80-year-old woman “preferred to leave this world by cutting her wrists,” rather than leaving her home in Czechoslovakia.<sup>208</sup> In this case, the woman was unable to deal with the news that all the Germans were being pushed out, and resorted to suicide as a last resort to stay in Czechoslovakia. This is only one specific case, but this nameless old woman represents many other Germans who found themselves in similar situations. For these Germans, facing the prospect of an unknown future was more terrifying than death itself, because at least if they took their own lives, it was their choice. After examining the real conditions of the expulsions of the Germans, the decision of these Germans to take their own lives, while terrible, is not entirely surprising. Rather than face limited provisions, sexual violence, and verbal and physical abuse, these Germans took the only way they could to stay in their homeland and avoid the suffering experienced by their friends, families, and neighbors.

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<sup>207</sup> Schieder, No. 50, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 421-429. Schubert writes of the women who sought refuge from the Soviet troops in his church, as well as the mounting suicides in his area.

<sup>208</sup> Schieder, No. 80, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 463-464.

Even though all of these elements, from the initial surprise of the announcements to the physical and emotional toll the expulsions took on the expellees, created an experience that traumatized and irreversibly altered the three million Germans involved, some of the expellees were able to see the positive side of their predicament. O.F., a teacher from the Saaz district, was able to see past the illness and hunger that met her on the other side of the border, even though she was “destitute” and starving. Despite all the trials and suffering she faced on her journey and after she crossed the border, O.F. closes her account on a brighter note. She focuses on the fact that she could finally live “in freedom,” instead of in fear.<sup>209</sup> Her ability to maintain a positive attitude even in the face of extreme adversity shows the beginning of the transition into German society that took place after the expulsions were over. Of course, O.F. did not record her experiences until 1951, so she may have felt a bit more positive after six years had passed and her life had become at least slightly more stable. The passage of time may have helped O.F.’s attitude towards her expulsion, but even at the time, she may have been relieved to be away from the threatening guards and fear of violence that constantly surrounded the expellees on their journey.

The memory of the expulsions, particularly this early period of “wild transfers” produced a foundation upon which the collective memory of the Sudeten Germans was constructed. Because this moment in history was so significant in the lives of so many individuals, it stands to reason that it would be crucial to the group identity of Sudeten Germans as a whole. Nearly every Sudeten German either experienced the expulsions or has relatives who did, and it is that shared experience that unites them to this day. Ethnic identity is, of course, more complex than simply going through a terrible event together,

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<sup>209</sup> Schieder, Nr. 91, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 415-416.

but there are few forces that could have brought the Sudeten Germans together as a nation of ethnic Germans more forcefully. The shadow of the expulsions still lingers over Sudeten German identity and the collective memory of this period is crucial to understanding how the Sudeten Germans relate to one another and to other groups, including the Czechs and their fellow Germans living in present-day Germany.

After everything they went through, the German expellees had to adjust to life in Germany, Austria, or Poland, and live with the fact that they could not return to their homes. The “wild transfers” were only the beginning, however, and the majority of the ethnic Germans in Czechoslovakia were not evacuated until the following year. The Potsdam Conference and the Allied Powers of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union were instrumental in halting the “wild transfers” and monitoring the “organized transfers,” which were more regulated than the expulsions of 1945, but were still not ideal for the expellees. These transfers were not quite as traumatic or violent as their “wild” counterparts, but for the Germans who were expelled, they were still life-changing and irreversibly painful. Those Germans recorded their experiences in much the same way as the Germans transferred in 1945, and their accounts provide unique perspectives from which to examine the “organized transfers.”

“The first thirst was quenched”<sup>210</sup>: The “Organized Transfers” of 1946

While the “wild transfers” occurred months before their “organized” counterparts, they represented such a significant event in the lives of Sudeten Germans that rumors about the “wild” period spread among all Germans. Because of the suddenness of the

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<sup>210</sup> Schieder, Nr. 111, “Erlebnisbericht des Großkaufmanns Dr. August Kurt Lassmann aus Troppau,” *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 505-508.

initial expulsions, as well as the extreme brutality experienced by the expellees, stories and reports about the “wild transfers” spread quickly, which prompted some of the Germans who were expelled in 1946 to comment on the similarities and differences between the two periods. The reports of the “organized transfers,” even when they do not explicitly mention the “wild transfers,” invite comparisons between the two periods based on the attitudes of the Czechs involved, the desire of the Germans to leave Czechoslovakia, the pain of leaving home, the quality of life during the relocations, and the influence of rumors and the media on the experience of the German expellees. Overall, the German experience was improved from the “wild” period, but many expellees still had complaints about their treatment at the hands of their Czech and Allied guards. Moreover, although the Germans were significantly more eager to leave Czechoslovakia after nearly a year of living under Czech control, their pain is palpable when they describe leaving their homeland for the last time and seeing it pass by through the windows of a train.

The bittersweet quality of the “organized transfers,” as compared to the almost entirely negative feelings of the expellees during the “wild transfers,” helped the German expellees consider both the negative and positive aspects of the expulsions. For those who had family members involved in the “wild transfers,” the impression of the Czechs is overwhelmingly negative, although some expellees saw a change in the Czech attitude from the “wild” period to the “organized transfers. For instance, N.R., a businessman from Brünn, writes of his wife’s experience when their entire village was marched to the Austrian border and brutalized along the way. He even goes so far as to say that “This inhuman act will be a permanent disgrace for the Czech nation,” because of the treatment

of the expellees on their march.<sup>211</sup> Others did not feel quite so strongly, but because of N.R.'s personal connection to the expellees, he was particularly appalled by the cruelty and violence of the Czechs. Dr. August Kurt Lassman, on the other hand, emphasizes the change over time that resulted in the increasingly humane treatment of the Germans during the "organized transfers." He reports that the "general brutality of the year 1945" had largely disappeared, except in "isolated incidents" during 1946.<sup>212</sup> Those "isolated incidents," one of which will be discussed later in this chapter, had the potential to be extremely violent, but the limited scope of such incidents made them less significant in the narrative of the "organized transfers." It is in Lassman's account that the phrase in the title of this chapter is found, as he focused on the positive improvements from the 1945 transfers, although he later goes on to comment on the difficulties the expellees still faced during their journey.

Those difficulties largely came from the continued negative attitude aimed towards the expellees by the Czechs with whom they interacted until they crossed the border. Sometimes, this interaction was restricted to discrimination and specific regulations against the Germans, emphasizing the need to remove the Germans as quickly as possible, or spreading rumors among the Germans to cause them additional mental and emotional suffering during their journey.

In the first case, some expellees, who were provided with few or no provisions for their journey, found themselves unable to enter businesses to buy food with the little money they were able to keep. According to the same Dr. Lassman who focused on the positive changes in the Czech attitude in terms of violence, many businesses in his

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<sup>211</sup> Schieder, Nr. 103, "Erlebnisbericht des Haufmanns N.R. aus Brünn," *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 486-488.

<sup>212</sup> Schieder, Nr. 111, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 505-508.

hometown began to carry signs that forbade entrance to the very shops that would provide them with the food and supplies they needed to survive on their four-day train ride. Of course, this treatment is reminiscent of Nazi treatment of Jews and other ethnic groups during the 1930s and 1940s. Fortunately for Lassman and his family, though, he was able to appeal to a shopkeeper he had known before the war, who provided him with the provisions about which he writes, “We lived off of the things he gave us for the entire trip.”<sup>213</sup> Lassman’s account is more optimistic than many of the accounts because of the assistance he received from the sympathetic shop owner, but his experiences are still relevant, since they contrast so distinctly with those of the transferees during the “wild transfers,” as well as with the experiences of many of his fellow Germans during the “organized transfers.”<sup>214</sup> Many of Lassman’s fellow expellees were not so lucky and were forced to rely on the Czechs for their provisions, which were certainly better than the nonexistent food and care during the “wild transfers,” but were still extremely lacking, considering the length and difficult nature of the journey.

Lassman’s account of struggling with discrimination based on perceived flaws in his ethnicity mirrors the anti-Semitism that was so prevalent in Nazi Germany. One author suggests that the anti-Semitic and anti-Slavic policies of the Nazis were born out of the sense that non-Germans were an “undesired, yet necessary presence,” which made Germans in authority nervous about controlling such apparently foreign elements.<sup>215</sup> It could be argued that the Czechs felt a similar sort of emotion towards the German population within their borders. The Sudeten Germans, as well as their fellow Germans in

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<sup>213</sup> Schieder, Nr. 111, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 505-508.

<sup>214</sup> Schieder, Nr. 111, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 505-508.

<sup>215</sup> Peter O’Brien, “Continuity and Change in Germany’s Treatment of Non-Germans.” *International Migration Review*, 22 no. 3 (The Center of Migration Studies of New York, 1988) 112.

so-called “linguistic islands” elsewhere in Czechoslovakia, made up such a large percentage of the population that the expulsions caused significant political and economic shifts within Czechoslovakia. Their presence had become much more undesired than necessary, and they were therefore expelled as quickly as possible.

There are also similarities between Czech behavior during this period and Nazi policies of “cultural discrimination.” Even before the Nazis and the Nuremberg Laws, there was a long history of anti-Semitic and anti-Polish policies that excluded the Jewish and Polish populations of Germany from participating fully in the culture of their country.<sup>216</sup> Similarly, by forbidding Germans from entering shops in their hometowns in Czechoslovakia, the Czechs were sending a message that the Germans were unwelcome, and would not be able to assimilate into the newly formed republic. Nazi policies were obviously focused much more intensely on the idea of racial supremacy than the orders and decrees that allowed for the expulsions of the Sudeten Germans, which came out of fear of German political and cultural power. There are still certain aspects of the expulsions that echo the anti-Semitic and anti-Polish policies enacted in Germany, however. The similarities between prewar Nazi policies and postwar Czech policies could be explained by the expansion of the Nazis into Czechoslovakia and the subsequent spread of their ideas and methods, as well as the intensely negative feelings generated by those ideas and methods during the Nazi occupation.

The negative Czech attitude towards the expellees can be seen even more clearly in an account that comes from Dr. Karl Grimm, a doctor working in a deportation camp near Brüx. He recalled a specific Czech who was credited with saying that “the only good

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<sup>216</sup> O’Brien, “Continuity and Change,” 112-113.

German is the evacuated German.”<sup>217</sup> For this unnamed Czech, as well as others who likely felt similarly, the Germans represented a malicious force within the boundaries of Czechoslovakia, and it was therefore necessary to remove them from the country.<sup>218</sup> Of course, the Germans were not as reluctant to leave by the time the “organized transfers” began, so the violent coercion of the “wild transfers” was largely unnecessary. Grimm also described the attitudes of the Germans as they approached their deportation.

They had nothing more to lose, everything had gone anyhow and they could only hope to gain. No matter what their life held in store for them, it could not be worse than what they had experienced here. They had suffered too much for the simple fact that they were Germans, therefore they wanted to hold on to this last possession, they did not want to become Czechs and Communists, they wanted to be Germans and be free. Just as a patient after a serious operation, wakes up from his narcosis and shows first signs of life, these people, after all their terrible experiences and psychological depression, showed the first signs of life and of re-awakened self-confidence, of pleasure that their lives had been spared and of hope in a new future.<sup>219</sup>

According to Grimm, the Germans had been so beaten down by the Czechs during the period between the end of the war and the beginning of the “organized transfers” that they could not wait to leave their suffering behind to start their new lives in Germany. As the accounts of the “wild transfers” and the following accounts of the “organized transfers” illustrate, the German plight in the postwar period was severe. Violence, threats, and death loomed over their everyday lives, forcing them to find hope wherever possible, even if it meant leaving their homeland and starting new lives in a new country. The Czechs certainly felt justified in expelling the Germans, as did numerous other nations in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Third Reich, but it is hard not

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<sup>217</sup> Schieder, No. 99, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 489-495.

<sup>218</sup> Schieder, Nr. 108, “Bericht des Dipl. Volkswirts Fritz Peter Habel aus Olmütz,” *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 497-499. Habel writes of the attitude of Czech officials in their desire to remove the Germans as quickly as possible from the country.

<sup>219</sup> Schieder, No. 99, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 489-495.



to sympathize with a people who were removed from their homelands and harassed on the journey, simply because of their identification as Germans. It is interesting in this account, however, to see how the attitude of the German people changed, since during the “wild transfers,” so many people pointed out their allegiance to the Czech nation. Here, at least in Grimm’s memory, the Germans are willing to accept their expulsion, since they no longer wish to join the Czechoslovak state or the Communist party. After their treatment at the hands of both the Czechs and the Soviets, it is easy to see why they would be so eager to leave both behind and begin anew in Germany.

Several accounts describe the “escape” from Czechoslovakia, and, although Grimm’s description of the German people as a “patient after a serious operation,” showing their “first signs of life” at the end of their ordeal is unique, it seems that the Germans were generally less reluctant to leave the Heimat behind after observing what their lives would be like if they stayed. Many accounts discuss the desire to take off the armbands the Germans were forced to wear as identification.<sup>220</sup> The armbands represented their submission to the Czech government and people, and when they were allowed to take them off after crossing the border, the overwhelming feelings among many of the expellees were relief and hopefulness. Removing those armbands represented the freedom of the expellees, as they were no longer going to be singled out and excluded from the cultural life of their communities. The “hope in a new future” that Grimm mentions is echoed in other accounts, including that of Professor Josef Freising, who describes the ability of the expellees to block out their living conditions and

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<sup>220</sup> Schieder, No. 102, “Report of the experiences of Hermann Schubert, priest from Trautenau,” *Documents on the Expulsion*, 499-500; and Schieder, Nr. 108, 497-499; Nr. 110, “Erlebnisbericht der Büroangestellten E.H. aus Olmütz,” 502-504, both in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*. These accounts discuss the celebratory removal of the armbands upon crossing the German border, as well as the relief that removal of those armbands produced among the expellees.

treatment by focusing on their desire to be free. Freising writes that “We only focused on our yearning for freedom. We all wanted to be free men,” even though the Germans in his group, many of whom were sick, were living in extreme squalor.<sup>221</sup> By the time the Germans were expelled in the “organized transfers,” it had become abundantly clear to them that they were no longer welcome in the new Czechoslovak Republic, which likely prompted their change of heart. They did not know what to expect in Germany, but, as Grimm points out, they believed that nothing they faced in their new lives could be as bad as what they had suffered in Czechoslovakia for the past months. At least one expellee noticed this change of heart and, rather than claiming that the Germans had found hope in their new situation, asserted that they had, instead, found their current situation too hopeless to maintain.<sup>222</sup>

Unlike the expellees in the “wild transfers,” these Germans knew that the deportations were coming, so they were better prepared for the trauma of transfer than previous groups. Many of the accounts that describe feelings of hope and joy about leaving are either undated or from the 1950s, when the world was shifting towards a Cold War sensibility and feelings about Eastern Europe were becoming progressively more negative. Professor Freising’s account was recorded in 1947, which could explain his emphasis on the camp environment and emotions among the encamped expellees. He was so close to the events during that part of the expulsion that he was uniquely able to focus on the specific details of encampment and the expulsion itself, rather than bringing the

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<sup>221</sup> Schieder, Nr. 115, “Erlebnisbericht des ehemaligen Abgeordneten im tschechoslowakischen Parlament Professor i.R. Josef Freising aus Brunn,” *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 513-516. Freising reports that there were few nurses, with only one for every four hundred and fifty people, as well as little food and rampant disease.

<sup>222</sup> Schieder, Nr. 111, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 505-508. This account from Dr. Lassmann reports that the expellees were so eager to leave that they were looking to volunteer for transports, recognizing the “hopelessness of staying.”

experiences of later years into his memories of the transfer. For the others, the passage of time and the escalation of Cold War tensions may have colored their reflections at least slightly.

There was still, of course, a significant sense of loss when the Germans left their homes, because, no matter how bad things were under the Czechs, these Germans felt that their homeland was the Sudetenland and they still lamented leaving. Even though many felt a sense of hope that things could only get better, and began to show the “first signs of life” that Grimm pointed out, the loss of the Heimat still stung. For a people who had been bombarded for years with images and propaganda extolling the importance of a connection to a given area and culture, losing one’s home was a tremendous blow. For some, the experience of leaving one’s home behind, “disappearing in the twilight” as the train pulled out, was one of the most memorable and difficult aspects of the expulsion.<sup>223</sup> The memory of the “sadness in [their] hearts” at the moment of departure was extremely significant, as it weighed on them during their journey into Germany.<sup>224</sup> These expellees often saw their hometowns and homeland for the last time while they were fading away as the trains sped towards the German border. For those people who felt connected to their homes and farms in a very real way, such an informal and permanent departure was inevitably extremely difficult. Even if the authors of the reports did not specifically mention the emotions they felt upon leaving Czechoslovakia for the last time, the bitter sweetness of the expulsions lingers over every account of this period. In all cases, while the Germans were glad to have a chance to escape the oppression they felt under the new

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<sup>223</sup> Schieder, Nr. 112, “Erlebnisbericht des Dipl. Ing. Josef Kuhn aus Mährisch Schönberg,” *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 508-511. Kuhn had a particularly difficult transfer, with violence and threats from the Czech and Soviet forces accompanying the transport, but he still conveys the sadness felt by many expellees as they left their hometowns for the last time.

<sup>224</sup> Schieder, Nr. 115, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 513-516.

Czech regime, they were still understandably upset to be forced to leave their homes in order to find some peace.

The Czechs played on this sadness in order to counteract the feelings of “self-confidence” and “hope” that Grimm noticed among the expellees. Since the Czechs were expelling the Germans in order to eliminate the perceived threat they posed to the Czechoslovak state, they, justifiably or not, wanted the Germans to feel badly about what had happened during the war and even worse that they were being expelled from their homeland. Grimm describes the reaction of the Czechs to the widespread relief among the expellees that their suffering was coming to an end.

It annoyed the Czechs that the Germans did not leave with a heavy heart and that they made no attempt to conceal this. They therefore began to paint a black picture of Germany, saying that the country had been destroyed and will not recover for the next hundred years, that starvation ruled there and that the Germans in the Reich would not welcome the Sudeten Germans.<sup>225</sup>

Because the expulsions were meant to be forced and fairly unpleasant, even during the “organized period,” the fact that many Germans did not have a “heavy heart” as they left must have been distressing to the Czechs responsible for their removal. If the expulsions did not force the Germans to face what had happened under the Nazis and understand the collective guilt that was laid upon them, it is likely that the Czechs felt slighted. After all, they had suffered under the Nazis and certainly felt heavy-hearted about the repression of their national culture and language during the occupation, as well as the violence and brutality with which the Nazis ruled. It is certainly possible that they wanted the Germans to feel the same way as they were pushed across the borders. In fact, it would be more surprising if they had not reacted in this way, since their frustration was

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<sup>225</sup> Schieder, No. 99, Documents on the Expulsion, 489-495.

expressed so violently during the “wild transfers.” It seems unlikely that all of that frustration had dissipated after only a few months, so the idea that the Czechs accompanying the expellees would spread rumors about the horrors in Germany is not difficult to believe.

On the other hand, Grimm recorded his memories in 1950, several years after the expulsions ended. He was also in a unique position as a doctor in an expulsion camp, which exposed him to more Germans and Czechs than the average expellee. The combined effect of the passage of time and his continuous interaction with various groups of guards and expellees undoubtedly colored his memories when he was finally able to commit them to paper. It is likely that the Germans were, in fact, relatively happy to leave Czechoslovakia during the “organized transfers,” especially because there are several other accounts that report similar feelings. The Germans were also saddened by the loss of their homeland, but unlike the “wild transfers,” the “organized transfers” could be characterized by better preparation and increased willingness to leave the past both physically and mentally behind.

Ironically, the expellees, many of whom had been enthusiastic about coming “Heim ins Reich” under the Nazis when the Sudetenland was incorporated into the Third Reich, were now leaving their homes behind to permanently come “Heim ins Reich” in Germany. One expellee even called Germany “our new homeland” in his account, which shows the eventual German acceptance of their fate, and, at least in this man’s case, the optimism that Germany could potentially become a new Heimat for these Germans.<sup>226</sup> The Czechs, in their efforts to forcibly remove the Germans from their homes, may have been offended that the expellees felt any kind of eagerness to cross the border and

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<sup>226</sup> Schider, Nr. 110, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 502-504.

therefore began to spread rumors about the horrors of Germany in order to stifle those feelings of hope. While they were enthusiastic about removing the Germans from their country, the Czechs were likely also looking to find some kind of closure through the act of expulsion. Both points of view are understandable, and Grimm presents an intriguing picture of bittersweet feelings on both sides of the border. Each side displayed a combination of relief and unhappiness that the coexistence of Czechs and Germans would soon be over.

Part of the reason for these mixed feelings was the attitudes and emotions that naturally surrounded the physical act of expulsion, but the conditions and procedures involved in the encampment, examination, and expulsion of the remaining Germans were some of the most common and lingering memories among the expellees, even years after the “organized transfers” were over. Anna Riedl, a housewife from Komotau, presents an account of the living conditions she experienced during the “organized transfers.” It is important to remember, however, that Riedl did not record her memories until 1957, over ten years after the events she describes transpired. Examining her account, particularly in comparison to others that document the same period, will shed some light on the effects of individual recollections on the collective memory about an event. Riedl describes the experience of traveling to and settling into the camp called Michanitz, which handled many of the expellees during their journey.

We traveled now with a borrowed wagon into the camp. Our luggage consisted of three large sacks, three rucksacks, one suitcase, a laundry basket, in which we carried the dishes, and a bucket full of silverware. We weighed our bags at home, so that we wouldn't have more than fifty kilograms, even though we were never specifically told that we couldn't have more weight than that. In the camp our bags were not weighed, so we really lucked out. We were placed in a large room. There were around 100 people there, men and women mixed together. It was a wooden barrack,

which had formerly housed Russian prisoners who worked at Mannesmann. There was a small oven, in which one could cook.<sup>227</sup>

It is obvious from the way Riedl describes the journey that her experience was not as traumatic or violent as it would have been during the “wild transfers.” In fact, she is relatively matter-of-fact about the way she and her family packed up their belongings and prepared to leave. Even the luggage weight, which was such a hardship during the “wild transfers,” became something of a routine, as the fifty kilogram limit was apparently well-known. The Potsdam Agreement, which required that each expellee be allowed fifty kilograms of luggage, was likely publicized enough that the limit became common knowledge.<sup>228</sup> Despite the relative leniency of fifty kilograms, at least compared to the thirty allowed during the “wild transfers,” the regulations still caused “hardship” for some expellees, who were more concerned about what they wanted to bring, instead of how much it weighed.<sup>229</sup> For others, the desire to leave was strong enough that they were willing to leave with little more than the necessities. As E.H., an office worker from Komotau, put it, “what good are the most beautiful wine glasses if the luggage is limited to 70 kg per person and there are more important things to take with you?”<sup>230</sup> Unfortunately, the account from E.H. is undated, so it is impossible to know how time affected his memories about the specifics of the journey, but he and many other expellees distinctly remembered the searches of the luggage they were allowed to bring, as well as

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<sup>227</sup> Schieder, Nr. 101, “Erlebnisbericht der Hausfrau Anna Riedl aus Komotau,” *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 482-484.

<sup>228</sup> Schieder, No. 99, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 489-495. This account specifically mentions the Potsdam Agreement, as well as the willingness of the baggage handlers to allow people to keep most of what they brought with them. Of course, this account was recorded in 1950, so it is possible that the mention of the Potsdam Agreement was added, even if the author was not aware of it at the time of the expulsions.

<sup>229</sup> Schieder, Nr. 107, “Erlebnisbericht des Landwirts Adolf Czink aus Malspitz, Kreis Nikolsburg,” *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 496-497.

<sup>230</sup> Schieder, Nr. 110, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 502-504. Clearly, E.H. was allowed slightly more luggage than was the norm, but the sentiment still makes sense under the circumstances.

the continued confiscation of high quality or new goods by the Czechs. Anna Riedl was fortunate that her bags were not examined upon her initial entrance into the camp, but she would later find that she and her family would not escape unscathed.

While the Allied forces increasingly monitored the conditions of the expulsions, there was still room for the Czechs to make their authority felt, often through the baggage searches that the expellees faced throughout their journeys. Riedl was lucky when she first arrived, but she later found that one of her bags had been considerably lightened during a search that occurred out of the sight of the expellees.<sup>231</sup> Other expellees report witnessing the seizure of their goods and the goods of their neighbors in full view of everyone in the camp. The most commonly confiscated items included money, savings books, cigarettes, blankets, clothing, and other items of value such as jewelry or watches.<sup>232</sup> Thefts of expellees' belongings were nothing new, as similar actions were common during the "wild transfers," but certain elements of these searches and confiscations were distinct from those of the previous expulsions. Since the Potsdam Agreement was so specific about the conditions and necessities required in order for transports to be accepted, the thefts of expellees' belongings were downplayed both at the time and in later accounts of this period.<sup>233</sup> Because the expellees were expecting such

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<sup>231</sup> Schieder, Nr. 101, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 482-484. Riedl remains positive in her portrayal of the thefts, but she does mention that "curtains, towels, a lot of sheets, and shoes" had been removed from a large bag she and her family had packed for their journey.

<sup>232</sup> Schieder, No. 102, *Documents on the Expulsion* 499-500; and Schieder, Nr. 99, 489-495; Nr. 103, 486-488; Nr. 106, "Erlebnisbericht der kaufmännischen Angestellten Anna Mohorn aus Groß Aupa, Kreis Trautenau," 495; Nr. 107, 502-504; Nr. 108, 497-499; Nr. 109, "Bericht des Bauern N.N. aus Hultschin," 499-502; Nr. 111, 505-508; Nr. 113, "Erlebnisbericht des Bauern Franz Pröll aus Heinrichsöd, Gemeinde Wadestift, Kreis Kaplitz," 511-512, all in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*. The nearly unanimous complaints of theft among the authors of these accounts shows the widespread nature of the thefts, as well as the lack of control over the guards who were left in charge of the expulsions. In Nr. 111, Dr. Lassmann is especially upset that his important papers were confiscated, since he believed that a lack of papers put him and his family at a disadvantage when they reached Germany.

<sup>233</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 285. Luža claims that the expellees were "free to take their watches, wedding rings, alarm clocks, and bankbooks for accounts on German banks," even though those



behavior, they went out of their way to make new or high quality goods look used or “uninviting,” in order to maintain possession of items like bed linens and dishes.<sup>234</sup> The Germans were now anticipating the searches, so they were able to prepare themselves better, but even with the thefts, the Potsdam Agreement stipulated that each expellee had to have fifty kilograms of luggage. This requirement was likely put into place to prevent thefts by the supervising forces, but instead of stopping them, it merely resulted in creative maneuvering in some cases. One expellee reports that there was “a lot of shifting of belongings,” in order to hit the fifty kilogram limit.<sup>235</sup> This phenomenon is similar to the trading of new items for old in E. Wollmann’s account, analyzed in the previous section. The constant and unpredictable movement of consumer goods between and among Germans and Czechs was only the beginning for the expellees, however, who were then faced with life in the camps. Camp life was never pleasant, and for some expellees, this period lasted weeks or even months, particularly in the case of expellees who were ill or injured.

Anna Riedl describes a large room filled with people of both genders, which was fairly common in the transfer camps. In fact, her experience was relatively positive, considering the fact that another expellee described his accommodations as “little better

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were the items most often mentioned as stolen by the German authors of the accounts in Schieder’s collection. This difference in memory could illustrate the ways different groups of people can remember the same event but the end result is a very different history of a given period.

<sup>234</sup> Schieder, No. 100c, “Report of the experiences of Helmut Klaubert, of Asch,” *Documents on the Expulsion*, 496-499; and Schieder, Nr. 103, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 482-484. Both of these accounts detail the lengths to which expellees were willing to go in order to keep the Czechs from confiscating their goods. In the former case, Klaubert was simply discussing methods by which people tricked the Czechs, but in the latter, Anna Riedl found her artificially dirtied linens taken away when the Czechs were not fooled.

<sup>235</sup> Schieder, Nr. 111, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 505-508.

than a toilet,” with an estimated 500 people in a single room.<sup>236</sup> The specifics of the living conditions varied from camp to camp as well as between transports. Even within a single camp, there were more and less comfortable barracks, although the temporary nature of the expellees’ stay meant that even the “better” barracks were limited in their appeal.<sup>237</sup> For those in the “worse” barracks, or those who were housed in warehouses, conditions were often dire. One expellee called the conditions of the Jungbuch camp a “scandal,” because of the lack of sanitation facilities and the high number of deaths due to poor food and limited health services.<sup>238</sup> For most of the expellees, the experience of living in the camps, especially since it was so temporary, fell somewhere between the two extremes of comfort and squalor. In fact, movement between camps was not uncommon, since there were so many expellees to process and most of the trains to Germany left from the camps closest to the border, so even the most horrific experiences in camps were generally limited to a few days or weeks.

No matter where the expellees were staying at the time, one of the most common complaints among those who recorded their stories was the food. Both the low quality and the scarcity of the provisions given to the expellees, as well as a number of other significant elements of everyday life in a deportation camp, were discussed in a number of accounts, including Anna Riedl’s.

We were registered in the next few days. It was like the military: one had to be registered to receive food. It was mostly bread and soup, but it was edible. They also gave us a shower, where one could wash. The floors of the barracks were covered with straw sacks, but there were not as many bugs as in camp Michanitz. Barbed wire surrounded the camp and one

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<sup>236</sup> Schieder, Nr. 109. *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 499-502. The author, N.N., a farmer, reports that the expellees were “packed in like herrings” and were unable to “answer the call of nature” anywhere but in their living quarters.

<sup>237</sup> Schieder, No. 99, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 489-495.

<sup>238</sup> Schieder, No. 102, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 499-500.

could not get out. Later, we were sprayed with DDT, and could pick up our money, even though when we arrived, we had had to give up all our money and savings books. Now there were people who had had thousands of Reichsmarks, who were now given only one thousand marks each. If one had no money or savings books to be given, or didn't have a thousand marks, he was given 500 RM.<sup>239</sup>

The distribution of food is among the most commonly mentioned aspects of camp life and the expulsions. This is understandable, since the expellees were often entirely at the mercy of the Czechs and the Allies for their food during their journey. Outside of the experience of Lassmann, discussed above, most of the provisions that were available to the expellees were given to them by the Czechs, during their stays in camps, and the Allies, after they crossed the border. In at least one case, the expellees were encouraged to bring enough food for their journey, which could take up to ten days, but this does not seem to have been common for most expellees.<sup>240</sup> For Anna Riedl, the food she was given was at least “edible,” although it was very simple, and another expellee asserted that the food was “very good, since a German chef was supervising.”<sup>241</sup> In the latter case, the identification of the chef as German may have contributed to the expellees’ judgment of the quality of the food, since they were more likely to be favorably inclined towards food prepared by a German over a Czech. For other expellees, the food quality varied from “very bad” to “very poor” to “unfit for human consumption.”<sup>242</sup> Aside from the quality, the food that was given to the expellees was fairly uniform. There was generally a thin soup and some bread, with an occasional mention of black coffee, but everything

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<sup>239</sup> Schieder, Nr. 101, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 482-484.

<sup>240</sup> Schieder, Nr. 108, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 497-499.

<sup>241</sup> Schieder, Nr. 106, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 495.

<sup>242</sup> Schieder, No. 100c, 496-499; No. 104, 501-503, both in *Documents on the Expulsion*; and Schieder, Nr. 107, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 496-497.

that was given to the expellees was in “small portions.”<sup>243</sup> The expellees were often disappointed in the supplies and food given to them during the expulsions, but even the small rations they were given by the Czechs was an improvement over the near total lack of such provisions during the “wild transfers.” There is also a sense in at least two accounts that the food improved drastically after the trains crossed the border and left the expellees in the hands of the Allies.<sup>244</sup> This impression may be due to the fact that both of these accounts were written ten years after the expulsions ended, which may have exaggerated the contrast between the Czech and Allied experiences in the author’s mind. On the other hand, the near-universal complaints about the quality of the food given to the expellees by the Czechs, from accounts that were recorded at various times, indicates that there may be some truth beneath the disparaging remarks about the quality and quantity of food provided to the expellees.

Besides the food, the accommodations in the camps and treatment of the expellees while they were encamped were a significant issue for many of the Germans in question. On the Czech side, the primitive conditions of the barracks for the Germans were logical, since they were only temporary and the Czechs were not generally concerned with making the Germans particularly comfortable. As discussed above, Anna Riedl was actually rather fortunate to have “straw sacks” and a relative lack of bugs. On the other hand, the barbed wire surrounding the camp was part of the expulsion process

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<sup>243</sup> Schieder, No. 100c, 496-499; No. 102, 499-500, both in *Documents on the Expulsion*; and Schieder, Nr. 103, 486-488; Nr. 108, 497-499; Nr. 111, 505-508; Nr. 115, 513-516, all in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*. All of these accounts report a watery soup, often made from potatoes, as well as bread, which was distributed both in the camps and on the trains. Of these accounts, Nr. 111 is the most graphic in its descriptions, detailing the soup given to the expellees that was made from “rotting potatoes that had already been used several times.”

<sup>244</sup> Schieder, No. 100c, 496-499; No. 104, 501-503, both in *Documents on the Expulsion*. The second of these accounts describes the “hot and strengthening soup” given to the expellees in their “clean German railway carriages,” which emphasizes the differences between the expellees’ experiences in the Czech Republic and their improved lives in Germany.

that several accounts mention as instrumental to their sense of isolation and separation from the rest of the country of Czechoslovakia.

It is understandable that the Czechs would look to hold the Germans in a way that would keep them from escaping their fate, because the whole motivation of the expulsions was to eliminate the German threat to the new republic. It could also be argued that this isolation and disconnection helped the Germans make the break with the Heimat that they needed in order to transition into Germany. If that was the case, the isolation of the expellees, combined with the persecution they felt during the postwar period, indicate that the feelings of hope for a new life and optimism about the future make considerable sense. Indeed, the fact that the expellees were constantly surrounded by barbed wire and guards, as several accounts describe, would surely not have increased the expellees' sentimental attachment to the Czechoslovak Republic.<sup>245</sup> Occasionally, the expellees were able to work in nearby towns or to seek medical attention outside the camps, but even this was often regulated and there are few instances of this behavior during the "organized transfers," as it seems the Czechs preferred to keep the expellees contained and separate from the rest of the population.<sup>246</sup> This isolation had physical and emotional consequences for the expellees and may have impacted the way they felt about their former fellow citizens, increasing their willingness to leave a country that so clearly did not want them.

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<sup>245</sup> Schieder, Nr. 99, 489-495; Nr. 102, 499-500, both in *Documents on the Expulsion*; and Schieder, Nr. 109, 499-502, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*. Account No. 102 emphasizes the change over time from little security to increased guards and a ban on visitors or contact with the outside world at the camp in Jungbuch.

<sup>246</sup> Schieder, Nr. 107, 496-497; Nr. 115, 513-516, both in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*. The second of these accounts details the difficulties one expellee had in finding adequate medical attention, since there was an extremely limited medical staff and total control over expellee activity by the administration of the camp.

In addition to the isolation of the camps, the use of pesticide sprays, as well as violence and even searches of the expellees' bodies, contributed to their detachment from Czechoslovakia. Because of the bugs, which Anna Riedl briefly mentions above, and the diseases that ran rampant in the camps, there was always a question about whether or not the expellees would be allowed into Germany. The Allies were unwilling to take expellees who were infested with lice, because of the health and safety concerns involved, which in the context of the devastation of the postwar period makes perfect sense. Therefore, all expellees were superficially searched and dusted with DDT before boarding the trains.<sup>247</sup> The element that is most troublesome is the administration of these procedures. The Czechs were more concerned with processing large numbers of expellees than with their comfort, and some Germans reportedly felt "shy" about the examinations, particularly the women. The "mass examinations" provoked these feelings of nervousness, and the Czechs were more concerned about the results than the process, for fear that the Americans would refuse to accept a transport for medical reasons, such as lice infestations.<sup>248</sup> The Czech concern about getting the Germans out overrode all other priorities, and made the experience of delousing, which was only to be expected, due to the bad conditions of the camps, even worse than it should have been.

Beyond the dehumanization of the delousing and preventative treatments of diseases and pests, there was still a threat of violence that lingered over the expulsion proceedings, despite the Potsdam Agreement and its regulations meant to prevent such complications. The violence and abuse that were so common during the "wild transfers"

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<sup>247</sup> Schieder, No. 99, 489-495; No. 100c, 496-499, both in *Documents on the Expulsion*; and Schieder, Nr. 106, 495; Nr. 107, 496-497; Nr. 108, 497-499; Nr. 110, 502-504; Nr. 113, 511-512, all in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*.

<sup>248</sup> Schieder, No. 99, 489-495.

were largely quelled, but isolated incidents of humiliation and brutality still occurred. In one such case, an expellee named Josef Kuhn witnessed a cruel game being played with the expellees. He reports that the transport train stopped during the night and the guards took advantage of the time to “torture us to complete exhaustion.” This torture took the form of a degrading game called “playing dogs,” in which two men would be forced to undress and chase each other around on all fours, biting each other as they went. Kuhn describes the way the men were punished if they did not do this quickly enough, with the guards delivering “blows with wire rods,” which were accompanied by “howls and obscene Russian vocabulary.”<sup>249</sup> In this case, it is difficult to determine whether the guards were Czechs or Russians, but the author had been held in a Russian prison camp after the invasion of the Red Army, so it is possible that these guards were, in fact, Soviet soldiers. On the other hand, Kuhn states that this game was called “playing dogs” by the Czechs, so it is also possible that the guards were Czech. Kuhn’s account was also written eleven years after the expulsions, so it is possible that his existing negative opinions of the Soviets and Czechs increased with time, making his memories slightly blurred. Either way, the treatment of the expellees in this transport was appalling. The specific details Kuhn remembers also indicate that this was not an invention of his distorted memory, but rather an actual event that he witnessed. The fact that there are few, if any, other accounts that describe such violence does indicate that conditions had generally improved after the Potsdam Agreement, since such behavior was fairly common during the “wild transfers.”<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Schieder, Nr. 112, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 508-511.

<sup>250</sup> Luža, *The Transfer of the Sudeten Germans*, 288. Luža points out that the inhumane policies of the “wild transfers” were stopped during the “organized transfers,” but he does acknowledge that there may

In another case, an expellee was held in a camp that required a mandatory strip search of all expellees. In most cases, the expellees were searched, as was their luggage, but this is the only account in this collection that describes a mass strip search. This account describes the way the expellees were “herded into a room” in one large group, men, women, and children all together. The author of the account, who is male, is most offended by the treatment of the women and girls during this process. He asserts that the Czech guards, all of whom were male, “seemed to search the women and girls with particular satisfaction, looking at them in the most unbelievably shameless manner.” It is certainly possible, and even likely, considering the treatment of women and girls during the “wild transfers,” that the Czechs did exploit their power over the expellees to humiliate and dominate the women being searched. On the other hand, the author’s obviously anti-Czech feelings come out in his last sentence on the topic: “That is Czech morality.”<sup>251</sup> The bitterness of the author towards his former fellow citizens is clear, and the fact that nine years passed between his experiences and his recording of those experiences likely only exacerbated his already negative emotions about the Czechs. By disparaging their morality, he may be making a statement about the expulsions in general, since, if the Czechs are so immoral as to abuse their power so blatantly, it could be argued that the expulsions themselves were unjust. The German memories of this event, clearly stated in this case, but often veiled under ostensibly objective “facts,” display the continued tension between the Germans and the Czechs, even a decade after the events of the expulsions were over. The collection of individual memories only magnifies this

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have been some “confusion” at the beginning of the post-Potsdam operation. That “confusion” may have contributed to the extreme violence on display in Kuhn’s account.

<sup>251</sup> Schieder, Nr. 109, *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 499-502.



tension and shows the way group memories can be shaped by the individual feelings of each person who contributes.

The above two cases are extreme, but to return to Anna Riedl's more typical experiences, one can see the emphasis on money that is common to many expulsion accounts. Along with the searches and confiscations of material objects, the seizure of cash and savings books by camp administrators was a major concern for many expellees. This is reasonable, since it was understood that there would be few resources for the expellees when they arrived in Germany, and the expellees did not want to be at a disadvantage. It was mandated that each expellee have at least 500 Reichsmarks (RM) when they arrived in Germany, although there were some early transports that allowed 1000RM for each expellee, including Anna Riedl's.<sup>252</sup> Several accounts describe the change over time from the relatively generous 1000RM to the 500RM that later transports were given, as well as the feelings of disappointment among the expellees when they saw their assets reduced to almost nothing.<sup>253</sup> Although it was certainly useful to mandate a minimum amount of money that the expellees were required to have, the fact remains that any money or savings above that level were taken away, which meant that the expellees, who had already lost their homes and most of their belongings, were left truly destitute before even arriving in war-torn Germany. Interestingly, in Anna Riedl's case, she reports that "If one had no money or savings books to be given, or didn't have a thousand marks, he was given 500 RM," which is unique to her account. These details show the extent to which the Potsdam regulations were followed by the

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<sup>252</sup> Schieder, No 99, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 489-495; and Schieder, Nr. 103, 486-488; Nr. 106, 495; Nr. 107, 496-497; Nr. 108, 497-499; Nr. 111, 505-508; Nr. 114, "Bericht des F.S. aus Storzendorf, Kreis Sternberg," 512-513, all in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*.

<sup>253</sup> Schieder, No. 100c, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 496-499; and Schieder, Nr. 107, 496-497; Nr. 110, 502-504; Nr. 111, 505-508, all in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*.

Czechs as they pushed the Germans out, since in the “wild transfers,” they probably would have ignored those who had nothing and expelled them anyway. Because the primary goal was to remove the Germans, the Czechs were willing to adhere to the regulations mandated by the Allies, particularly when failure to do so would have resulted in the rejection of transfers. This is especially true in the case of money, as well as in the case of the delousing and health precautions, since the Czechs did not want to take any chances that the Allies would not accept the German expellees.

A final element of the expulsions that is commonly mentioned in nearly every account of the “organized transfers” is the organization of the transfer trains. Almost every expellee who recorded their memories reports that each train carried 1200 people and that there were 30-40 people in each car, depending on the length of the train.<sup>254</sup> It is unclear whether or not the specific details were actually memories of the authors, or if they derived from the well-known regulations in the Potsdam Agreement. It is certainly true that the Allies wanted to maintain some consistency in the number of expellees they were receiving in a given week, and it is possible that the expellees were either aware of this number during their journey or became aware of it in following years. It is remarkable that so many expellees were aware of the specifics, but as many of these accounts were recorded five to ten years after the fact, it is somewhat likely that the expellees’ memories changed when they received additional information after the expulsions were over. On the other hand, it is possible that, because of the expellees’ anxiousness to leave, they were acutely aware of how many people would fit in a given

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<sup>254</sup> Schieder, No. 99, 489-495; No. 100c, 496-499; No. 102, 499-500; No. 104, 501-503, all in *Documents on the Expulsion*; and Schieder, Nr. 101, 482-484; Nr. 103, 486-488; Nr. 106, 495; Nr. 107, 496-497; Nr. 108, 497-499; Nr. 110, 502-504; Nr. 111, 505-508; Nr. 113, 511-512; Nr. 114, 512-513, all in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*.

transport, so that they could make sure that they and their families would be able to travel together.

Aside from the number of people transported in a given train, the conditions in the train cars were a common theme among many of these accounts as well. It is true that living conditions during the “organized transfers” were higher than during the “wild transfers,” as the Allies wanted to ensure the relative safety and comfort of the expellees, but the improvement was slight, at best. For example, instead of open train cars or trucks, the “organized transfers” generally used closed cars with small iron stoves for heat. This sounds like a vast improvement, but the reality was that many of these trains were so packed with people and luggage that the heat was either inadequate or stifling, and the expellees had little space to sit or move around.<sup>255</sup> Therefore, while the “organized transfers” certainly improved upon the squalor of their “wild” counterparts, the expellees were far from comfortable during their journey. The discomfort they felt may have been nothing more than a side effect of the Czech desire to get the Germans out as quickly as possible, because packing trains with over a thousand people for each journey was certainly an efficient way of moving large numbers of people. It is also true that, had the transports violated the regulations of the Allies, the expellees would not have been allowed to cross the border, so responsibility for the conditions does not fall entirely on the Czechs. Had the Americans, British, French, and Soviets stipulated more extensive standards, it is nearly certain that the Czechs would have complied, due to their overriding concern with removing the Germans as soon as possible. The mistake of the Munich Agreement, which had allowed the Nazis to annex the Sudetenland in the first

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<sup>255</sup> Schieder, No. 102, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 499-500; and Schieder, Nr. 101, 482-484; Nr. 107, 496-497; Nr. 113, 511-512; Nr. 116, “Erlebnisbericht des Rentamts-Inspektors Franz Leitermann aus Bistritz, Kreis Markt Eisenstein,” 516-517, all in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*.

place, may have been part of the reason that the Allies did not push for harsher regulations. Their guilt for attempting to appease Hitler may have influenced their decision to require only the most basic guidelines for the “organized transfers.” Therefore, while many accounts seem to find the Czechs responsible for almost everything that happened, one must look farther than the perspectives presented by the expulsion accounts to see a more complete picture of the situation at hand.

In fact, there are some accounts that do go farther than simply focusing on the Czechs, finding the Allies, particularly in terms of the occupied zones of Germany, essential to the experience of the expulsions. As a preface to this section, it is important to keep in mind that many of the accounts dealing with the “organized transfers” are from the 1950s, which means that they are part of the larger Cold War discourse about Eastern Communism and Western “freedom.” I mention this because a number of accounts deal with the expellees’ desire to be transferred to West Germany rather than East. On its face, this would seem to indicate the expellees’ desire to escape the tyranny of Soviet Communism, but the fact remains that, in 1946, the borders between East and West had not yet solidified. Therefore, the expellees who are concerned with “escaping” the Soviets may be informing their memories of 1946 with the 1950s mentality in the West towards Communism.

All that said, the injection of Cold War terminology and attitudes into accounts of the “organized transfers” presents an intriguing example of the way memories change history and the alteration of “factual” events through opinion and perspective. For instance, one account states that, even though the expellees “didn’t know anything about what was in the West,” “[e]veryone feared going to Russian-occupied Germany, which

we knew would be just like our lives at that time in Czechoslovakia.”<sup>256</sup> This account details an expulsion in August 1946, so it was long after the Soviets had invaded, but the Czech government was still in place, so it is unclear why the author believes that the Russian zone would be like Czechoslovakia. In fact, this statement seems to be a clear indication of later opinions seeping into an account, because of the fact that, in 1946, most of the German ideas about the Soviets would likely still have been influenced by the racist propaganda of the Nazi regime, rather than the Cold War ideology of Eastern tyranny. The transition between the two is obvious when comparing the accounts of the “wild” and “organized transfers.” Whereas in accounts of the earlier period, the Soviets are portrayed as an animalistic horde of beasts, as discussed in the previous chapter, the discourse in accounts of the “organized transfers” deals primarily with the perceived “freedom” in the West. Indeed, there is only one account that addresses issues similar to those during the “wild transfers,” such as rapes and hunger, which were, in this case, blamed on Soviet administration. This author, Helmut Klaubert, describes the news coming over the radio that detailed Soviet atrocities, but because most of the Germans were not allowed access to the radio, this was an extremely isolated case.<sup>257</sup> In most other cases, the isolation of the camps prevented the expellees from hearing about almost anything going on in the outside world, including what to expect in Germany.

Because of the lack of information generally given to the expellees, several accounts detail the rumors surrounding each transport, particularly in terms of where each train was headed. Rumors of the “last transport” to the American zone were apparently fairly common, and, according to the authors of several accounts, such rumors provoked

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<sup>256</sup> Schieder, Nr. 111, 505-508.

<sup>257</sup> Schieder, No. 100c, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 496-499.

numerous volunteers for the transports in question.<sup>258</sup> In the same account that records the news of Soviet behavior coming over the radio, Helmut Klaubert also describes the rumors that surrounded his transport. He writes that there was widespread speculation about their destination until they had almost arrived. He also mentions that the Germans felt that they “had been cheated. Is anybody able today to imagine our bitter disappointment?” These feelings of being “cheated” and disappointed may have been due to the fact that the Czechs told the expellees that they were on the “last transport to Western Germany,” despite the marks of hammer and sickle on the sides of the train cars. On the other hand, the desire of some of the expellees to get to the West was not altered by the endpoint of their transport. Klaubert reports that, when nothing happened with regards to another transport to take willing expellees to West Germany, “some families took the risk and started their own journey westwards.”<sup>259</sup> This sense of the need to get to the West may have been felt by those who feared Soviet brutality and alleged animalistic tendencies, but it seems likely that, since this account comes from 1956, there are some Cold War overtones infiltrating an otherwise fairly straightforward account of an expulsion. The desire to escape into the “freedom” of the West certainly sounds like a Western construction intended to show the oppression of Communism, rather than an impulse that would come naturally to expellees who were already exhausted from their long journey and were not likely looking to travel any farther.

One of the most interesting aspects of the expulsions was the German attitude towards the Allies when they were mistreated. Because of the Potsdam Agreement, it was understood that the expellees would be safe and treated relatively well during the

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<sup>258</sup> Schieder, No. 100c, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 496-499; and Schieder, Nr. 101, 482-484; Nr. 108, 497-499, both in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*.

<sup>259</sup> Schieder, No. 100c, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 496-499.

transfers. Some expellees, however, felt that the Allies should have taken more interest in the conditions they experienced and shown more care towards the expellees. Hermann Schubert, a priest from Trautenau, had some particularly interesting comments when he recorded his memories of his transport's march to the train station.

There are old people who find it very hard to walk through the soft snow and little children clutching their mothers who are loaded with hand luggage. It is a pitiful sight. Where are the American film reporters? They would find material here for a new documentary film.<sup>260</sup>

It is certainly an interesting point, because the end of the war meant that the Germans were at the mercy of the Allies, particularly in terms of the news and media to which they were exposed. For instance, in Germany itself, many Germans were forced to watch films about the Holocaust, like *The Death Mills*, in order to receive rations in the American zone. These coerced viewings were intended to force the German people to deal with the horrors of the Nazi period and respond with the appropriate amount of shame and repentance by directly addressing the consequences of Nazi power.<sup>261</sup> It is not clear how much of that same sort of treatment was present in Czechoslovakia at the time, but it certainly seems that the expellees felt ignored by the Allies, except for the minimal regulations to maintain their relative safety during the expulsions. What Schubert seems to be expressing is resentment about the way the Allies addressed the issue of the “organized transfers,” which were intended to be more “humane.” Rather than truly enforcing the Potsdam Agreement and ensuring that the expellees made it to Germany with all of their belongings and in one piece, it seems that the Allies were more concerned with appeasing the countries in Central and Eastern Europe who had suffered

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<sup>260</sup> Schieder, No. 102, *Documents on the Expulsion*, 499-500.

<sup>261</sup> Robert R. Shandley, *Rubble Films: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001) 14.

so much under the Nazis. To some degree, this concern with the formerly occupied territories is understandable, because of the damage the Nazis had done, but it is hard to argue that the Allies could and probably should have done more to protect the vulnerable expellees. For people who had been, if not anti-fascist, at least passive towards the regime, the apparent blindness of the Allies to their plight was inexcusable. The “pitiful sight” presented by the marchers, including the elderly and small children, was, to the expellees, enough to justify empathy and care from the Allied powers. Moreover, because so many of the expellees believed in their own innocence, it was difficult for them to believe that they deserved to be treated in this way.

The “organized transfers,” while they promised to be considerably less brutal or traumatic for the expellees, were often remembered as painful experiences for the Germans in question. The loss of the Heimat and the treatment they experienced on their journey combined to make these expulsions, if not quite as violent as their predecessors, just as difficult for the expellees. Granted, the Czechs were primarily concerned with removing the German population from their new republic, and the Allies were looking to help bring peace to the region. It is also true that many of the accounts of the “organized transfers” were written in a Cold War context, which may have contributed to the exaggerations of the negative elements of the expulsions at least slightly to show the superiority of the Western world, as compared to Eastern Communism. Several expellees also report feeling anxious to leave a country that so clearly did not want them. There is no doubt that the expellees faced hostility and the threat of violence along their journey, and the Czechs were generally unconcerned with the expellee’s comfort, beyond the stipulations of the Potsdam Agreement. All of these elements combined to create the



bittersweet tone found in most of the expulsion accounts. While the expellees were relieved to escape Czech domination, they still longed for the Heimat and were emotionally (and occasionally physically) scarred by the experience of expulsion. The aftermath of the “organized transfers” left many expellees destitute and adrift in a new country. The fact that the Sudeten Germans have, as a group, continued to feel united by their common experiences, while still integrating into German society, is remarkable. Their collective memories of the expulsions, which are shaped by perspective, time, and personal experience, remain one of the most intriguing aspects of this period of European history.

The collective memory of this whole period continues to shape Sudeten German life and identity to the present day. The presence of Cold War ideology in some of the accounts recorded here does not delegitimize the real emotions and experiences of the people involved, and actually point to the incredibly subjective nature of national history. Rallying around their treatment during the expulsions, the Sudeten Germans have been able to construct a unified ethnic identity that remains, at least to some degree, more than sixty years after the expulsions ended. After examining the accounts of various Sudeten Germans involved in the “wild” and “organized transfers,” it is possible to see the ways their experiences coincide and separate down to the smallest details of their lives during this period. By combining all of these stories, the collective memory of the expulsions becomes clear, and the subjectivity and interpretability of these stories only increases their appeal as the foundation for a Sudeten German identity within the context of postwar Germany.

## Conclusion

Summing up the previous hundred and forty pages of information is almost as futile a task as trying to tie up all the loose ends of the expulsions themselves. Therefore, this conclusion is not meant as a summation, but a continuation of the ideas and themes that hopefully came out in the previous chapters. The physical and emotional impact of the expulsions cannot be ignored, but the consequences for collective identity and history itself are still more interesting.

Coming out of the previous chapter, it can be tempting to see the expulsions as little more than an exercise in cruelty and revenge. If the purpose of this study was to recount the German side of the story, that would be an easy assumption to make. Poring over heartbreaking accounts of abuse, violence, and humiliation can provoke empathetic feelings in any reader. While the expulsion reports do provide modern readers with important information about the process of population transfer, however, they cannot be read in a vacuum. Without a proper understanding of the relationship between Czechs and Germans, as well at least an attempt to understand the Czech point of view, historical events that are already charged with emotion and tension are easy to oversimplify into inevitabilities or simple dichotomies of “good” and “bad.” There was nothing inevitable about the expulsions of the Sudeten Germans, and it does a discredit to both the Czechs and the Germans to present it as such. Perceptions of the events of 1945 and 1946 may differ and change, but it should be fairly evident by now that those differing and shifting perceptions are what make the expulsions so fascinating to study in the first place.

Taking a step back from the details of this study, several overarching themes make themselves obvious. First, the existence of so many individual accounts of the

expulsions presents historians with a unique opportunity to observe the development of a collective memory out of a variety of personal accounts. Second, examining the collective memories of both sides sheds some light on the identities of both the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans to the present day. Finally, the shared memories and identities that made this conflict so explosive can be used to show the ways in which history is permeated with individual perspectives and the influence memory and identity have on history in general. This case study can be expanded far beyond the borders of the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia, or even Europe, because the issues of memory, history, and identity are universal. The influence of one defining moment, like the population transfers of 1945 and 1946, can also impact perceptions of events from centuries before, simply by changing the frame of reference for the people involved.

The individual accounts of the previous chapter, to some extent, overshadow the first half of this study, simply because they are so intensely personal and moving. That is not to say that the historical context in which the expulsions took place is not important, because it is crucial to understanding what happened after World War II. There is a huge difference, though, between “established” or “fixed” history and the personal memories of people who lived through a historically significant event like the expulsions. When most people think of history, they think of the kind of information contained in the first part of this study, but there is a whole world of recorded memories and firsthand accounts that can make “normal” history that much more accessible and compelling. Collecting those eyewitness and participant memories creates a kind of consensus about what “really” happened. For instance, during the “organized transfers,” it is unclear whether the expellees really knew that 1200 people were allowed in each transport, or if they

found out later and, consciously or unconsciously, added it to the things that they personally remembered about the experience. Developing a consensus is made easier when people come from similar backgrounds and have similar opinions about what has happened. On the other hand, in submitting to the collective narrative, individual survivors or authors can find their own memories subordinated to the needs or requirements of the group.

This issue is a serious one, particularly in terms of an inherently traumatic event like the expulsions, as a group constructing a collective memory about a given situation tacitly approves overlooking some elements in favor of others. Overemphasizing the violence, oppression, and abuse suffered by the expellees has the potential to make the Sudeten Germans appear as nothing more than victims, brutalized at the hands of the cruel Czechs and Soviets. While no one could dispute the suffering of the expellees, whose lives were irrevocably changed, largely for the worse, by the expulsions, perceptive readers may question whether any Czechs were against the expulsions, or tried to help the expellees. By grouping all Czechs together under the label of “tormentors,” Sudeten Germans can largely avoid the tricky grey area of personal morality. Just as not all Sudeten Germans were Nazis, not all Czechs were Beneš supporters, rabidly awaiting their chance to punish the Germans for the Nazi occupation. In some accounts, individual Czechs did assist the expellees by giving them food or protection, but, just as Czech decrees inextricably linked “German” to “Nazi,” the collective memory of the Sudeten Germans creates a monolithic group of “Czechs,” who were entirely focused on the violent expulsion of the Sudeten German population. Collective memory makes such black and white terms possible by eliminating all subtlety or moderation. In order to

make a compelling narrative, collective memory must categorize, sort, and pronounce judgment on all elements of a given moment in history. Thus, for the Sudeten Germans, it may be convenient to recall the Czechs as nothing more than oppressive, violent attackers, while for the Czechs, the Sudeten Germans are generally remembered as Nazi sympathizers and perpetrators of horrific crimes.

The perception of complete innocence on one side and absolute guilt on the other is central to the interaction between Sudeten Germans and Czechs to this day. That interaction is complicated by the actions of members of both groups before, during, and after World War II. Both sides see the other as the perpetrator of a certain crime, and neither side is especially willing to acknowledge that the reality of the situation is much more complex than the collective memory would prefer to admit. The group identities of both the Czechs and Sudeten Germans have remained connected to this singular event in their shared history, even more than sixty years after the end of the expulsions. As Timothy W. Ryback pointed out in an article in the mid-1990s, the Czechs do not want to be identified with the deaths of thousands and expulsion of millions of Sudeten Germans, but their attempts to ignore the legacy of the population transfers only made the situation worse and nearly cost them membership in the European Union.<sup>262</sup> Thus, both the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans have had to come to terms with the past, both recent and distant, in order to move forward in the modern world.

The connection of Sudeten Germans to the expulsions is obvious and easy to understand. Nearly their entire national group was uprooted and abused in 1945 and 1946, and they continue to cling to their memories, both collective and individual, to

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<sup>262</sup> Timothy W. Ryback, "Dateline Sudetenland: Hostages to History," *Foreign Policy* no. 105 (Washingtonpost.Newsweek Interactive, LLC, 1996-1997) 164. The Czech Republic obtained full membership in the EU in 2004.

maintain their unity in their still relatively new homes in Germany. Their common history binds them together and prevents the stresses of living in self-perceived exile from disintegrating the community created by the shared suffering of the group during the expulsions. Even now that many of the survivors of the expulsions have passed away, many of their descendents still hold to the idea that there is an unbreakable bond between all Sudeten Germans, even those who have never seen the Sudetenland. These second- and third-generation Sudeten Germans have inherited the memory of the expulsions as an unexpected and entirely unjustified attempt to eliminate their entire group. This oversimplification does not capture the true motivations behind the event on the part of the Czechs, who had just lived through six years of Nazi occupation, which began after the Sudeten Germans had expressed their desire to join the Reich. It is also all too easy to overlook the role the Sudeten Germans played both before and after the Munich Conference in 1938, particularly in terms of the dismantling of the Czech state. In that light, the Sudeten German narrative of victimhood not only seems oversimplified, but also emotionally manipulative and unfair to the Czechs involved.

The connection of the Czechs to the expulsions is more obscured, often deliberately. As mentioned above, the Czechs have a self-perception of innocence that pervades their treatment of an admittedly difficult time in their history. They acknowledge that the transfers took place, and even admit to killing many Sudeten Germans, but that is as far as the collective memory allows many Czechs to go.<sup>263</sup> The perception that the expulsions were justified, due to Nazi atrocities like the massacre at Lidice, is not impossible to comprehend, but it does not capture the whole story. While many Germans did at least passively support the Nazis, the identification of “Germans”

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<sup>263</sup> Ryback, “Dateline Sudetenland,” 164.

with “Nazis” was and is not entirely fair. The identification of Czechs as victims is manipulative in much the same way as the German narrative. Each side sees itself as the victim of unjust oppression, and neither side is entirely incorrect. The problem comes from the widespread acceptance of these distortions as “fact.” Ideally, both Czechs and Sudeten Germans would accept their responsibility for what took place, and both would acknowledge the ways in which their collective memories and national identities play a role in the construction of the history of this period.

The interaction of these conflicting collective memories creates a situation that is not unique to the Czech-German relationship. The nature of collective memory makes it inherently specific to the group that calls upon it. Even within the United States, the interaction between white Americans and people from other cultures, including Native Americans, African Americans, and Japanese Americans, to name a few, are remembered differently on each side. Collective memory, particularly when it is employed to support national identity, can allow groups of people to overlook the negative aspects of their group and portray every conflict as an “us” versus “them” situation. No group wants to admit to the darker aspects of their collective past, and it is easier to create unity among people if there is a sense of the morality or goodness of the group. National and ethnic identity, while it is no longer nearly as fluid as it was in Central and Eastern Europe before World War II, is still, to some degree, a matter of choice. People are generally more likely to choose a given identity if it benefits them or provides them with an explanation for why their ancestors behaved a certain way. The collective memory then becomes the group’s history, whether or not anyone else agrees with that given group’s account. External opinions are irrelevant to the internal validity of the collective memory

within the group. It is for this reason that the Czechs and Sudeten Germans can have completely different memories of the expulsions and both can see their own memory as entirely correct. Their group histories have been accepted within their groups, and that is often the only qualification for accuracy within a national group.

The subjectivity of collective memory is not in question here, but rather why a given group might accept an account of a historical event that does not match with others. How can anyone be sure that the history they are reading is “accurate” or “objective”? In reality, there is no such thing as “objective” history, especially for an event as controversial as the expulsions. The obvious assumption, then, is that all history is subjective. In many ways, this is entirely true. The author’s point of view can transform an account of the “facts” of an event into a politicized treatise. Furthermore, the audience’s preconceptions and opinions about a given moment in time can shade its reading of history. All of these personal perspectives can make it difficult to find historical sources that give at least the appearance of impartiality. Those sources, however, no matter how straightforward they seem, are informed by the author’s opinions, and may only seem impartial because the author’s opinions coincide with the reader’s. Deciding what to include and what to omit in an account of any historical period is crucial to determining its final shape, and those decisions often reflect not only the interests of the author, but also his or her opinions about what happened.

Before writing this study, I had an idea that history was subjective, but I had no idea just how subjective it could be. In writing the first half of this study, I discovered how difficult it can be to balance detail and brevity. Harder still was balancing the two sides of the story, particularly since so many of the sources dealt with either the Czechs



or the Sudeten Germans, but rarely both. I know that my opinions crept into this paper, although I tried to avoid partiality as much as possible. If nothing else, this study has given me a new perspective on history as a field and it is my hope that its readers found it as illuminating as I have. The collective histories of the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans are interpretations of the past, but so is this paper. Every time anyone attempts to capture a historical event on paper, interpretation inevitably winds itself around the ostensibly “true” “facts.” There is no such thing as absolute truth in history, and neither primary nor secondary sources should be expected to be “objective.” Balancing perspectives and finding some kind of middle ground is essential to historical research and writing, but complete impartiality is impossible. This impossibility of impartiality is especially difficult to manage when reading the accounts of the horrific conditions and brutality suffered by Sudeten Germans during the transfers, because it is hard not to empathize with other human beings who suffered for reasons that they do not understand. I may understand the Czech point of view, but my instincts make it extremely difficult for me not to identify on an emotional level with the Sudeten German expellees.

This study, which began as a relatively straightforward examination of the expulsions and their aftermath, has transformed over the past year into an exploration of memory, history, and the way individuals can shape both their personal memories and a group’s history. For the three million Sudeten Germans expelled in 1945 and 1946, the expulsions represent a turning point in their development into a cohesive group, as well as the peak of their sense of uniqueness. For the Czechs who expelled them, the expulsions are a dark moment in a long history of peace and coexistence that was shattered by the Nazi occupation and the immediate postwar period. Neither side is

“wrong,” but the divergence of the two groups’ collective memories and group histories show that the gap between the two groups has never truly been bridged since the expulsions occurred. Moreover, the very history of this period is tinged with emotion, as is the history of earlier periods of Czech-German relations now that the expulsions have overshadowed the centuries of interaction that preceded them.

The collective memories and histories of the region, as well as those of the groups within it, provide historians a chance to see the development of relationships between ethnic and national groups. The rise and fall of the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia is a unique case, but it has elements that apply not only to other groups in the region, but also to history in general. The trends of collective memory and group history shape the history of the world, and the legacy of those forces is more complex than is immediately obvious. The final conclusion of this study is that history is more complicated than just the “facts,” and understanding even a piece of it takes both context and perspective. The subjectivity of history is a benefit, and allows everyone to access history in a way that appeals to them. Thus, rather than criticizing historians for allowing their own opinions to seep into their work, they should be praised for opening their audiences’ eyes to new ideas and showing them how powerful memory and history can be, when used in conjunction for the benefit of the reader.

The legacy of the expulsions should be measured in the consequences of the actions of both the Sudeten Germans and the Czechs, not in the exact details of what happened during 1945 and 1946. The memories and histories of this period are more interesting than the minutiae, and they have had the longer-lasting impact on the people involved. Therefore, the evolution of this study from a relatively simple examination of

the events of the expulsions into a wider-ranging exploration of memory and history is understandable and will hopefully be useful in explaining the significance of these events.

With all that said, I'd like to leave this study with the words of an expellee. He uses only a few words to sum up the experience of the expulsions better than the thousands of words that make up this paper: "*Ich kann es gar nicht in Worte kleiden.*"<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> "I cannot clothe it in words." Schieder, No. 73 *Dokumentation der Vertreibung*, 375-377.

## Appendix A: Key Names and Terms

### Names

*Beneš, Edvard*: President of the First Republic of Czechoslovakia (1935-1938), President of the Third Republic of Czechoslovakia (1945-1948).

*Frank, Karl Hermann*: Secretary of State in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (1939-1942), Reich Minister for Bohemia and Moravia (1942-1945), SS Obergruppenführer (Senior Group Leader) (1943-1945).

*Henlein, Konrad*: Leader of the SHF (1933-1935), Leader of the SdP (1935-1938).

*Heydrich, Reinhard*: Reich Protector of Bohemia and Moravia (1941-1942). Assassinated in Prague in 1942.

### Terms

*Heimat*: Literally translated, it means “homeland,” but it carries connotations of strong connections to a certain region or town. It also came to mean a connection to a national group during the 1930s and 1940s.

*Munich Conference*: A summit between the leaders of Great Britain, France, Nazi Germany, and Fascist Italy in September 1938, during which those leaders decided to grant the Sudetenland to Adolf Hitler in exchange for his cessation of aggression in Central and Eastern Europe.

*Potsdam Conference*: A summit between the leaders of Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union from July to August 1945, during which those leaders decided on the postwar division of Germany and officially sanctioned the transfers of ethnic Germans out of Central and Eastern Europe.

*Sudetendeutsche Heimatfront* (SHF): A cultural group to unite the Sudeten Germans in the First Republic of Czechoslovakia. Founded in 1933, became the SdP in 1935.

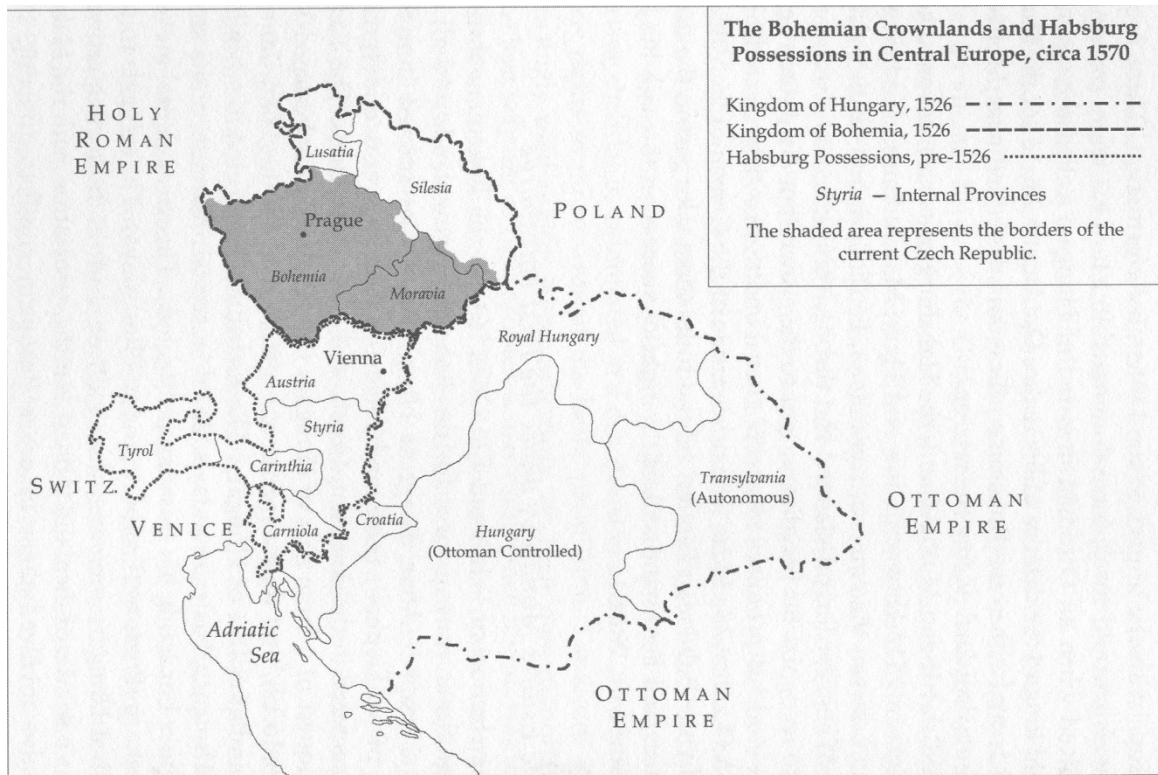
*Sudetendeutsche Partei* (SdP): A political party for the Sudeten Germans in the First Republic of Czechoslovakia. Established in 1935, disbanded in 1938, after the annexation of the Sudetenland by Nazi Germany

*Sudetenland*: The western border region of the present-day Czech Republic that contained nearly three million ethnic Germans before the population transfers of 1945 and 1946. See maps in Appendix B.

*Volksgemeinschaft*: Literally, it means “people’s community,” and it was central to the Nazi ideal of unity among the German people, even in diaspora.

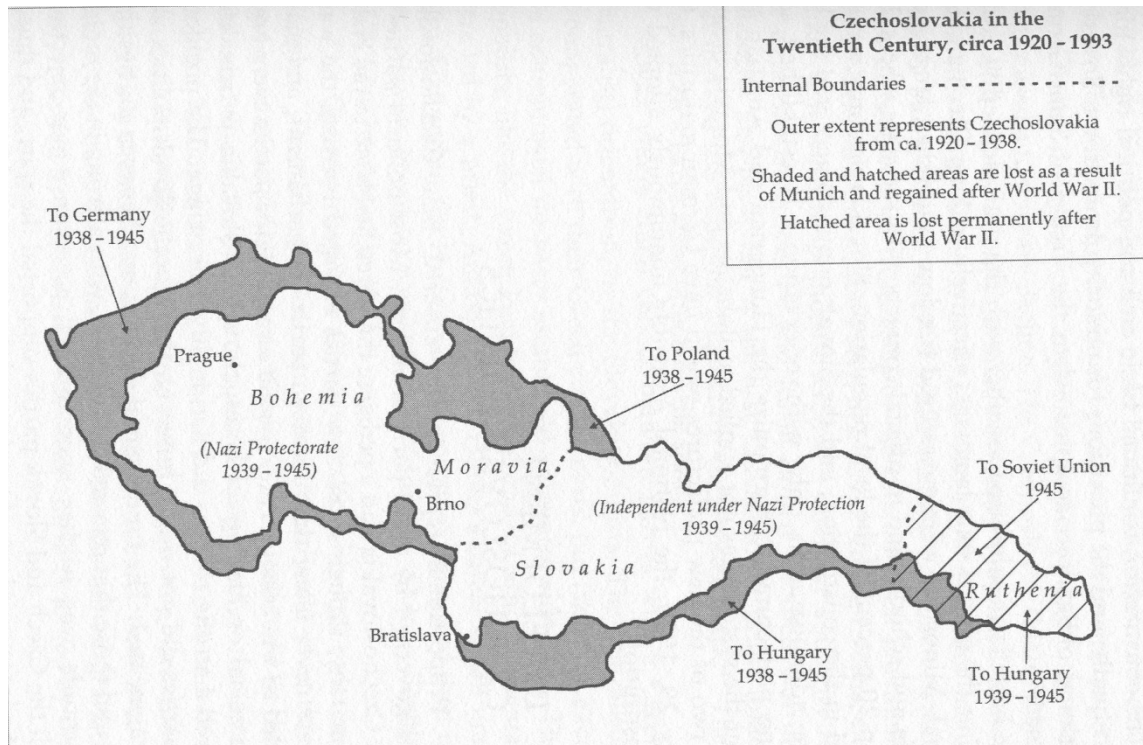
## Appendix B: Maps

### *The Bohemian Crownlands and Habsburg Possessions in Central Europe, circa 1570*



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## *Czechoslovakia in the Twentieth Century, circa 1920-1993*



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## *The Czech Republic Since 1993*



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